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**A Study of the New Testament Doctrine  
of Reconciliation and Salvation**

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New York  
The Macmillan Company

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To Lois, Sue,  
Charles, and Clarence

E. C. Caldwell 2-1-60

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.—Romans 5:10.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are . . . always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

—II Corinthians 4:7-11.

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## PREFACE

This is a study of the doctrines of reconciliation and salvation in the Christian faith. The principal source shall be the New Testament, and because of this the work may be regarded as a study in one phase of New Testament theology. The main purpose of the treatise is to call attention to the place the Resurrection of Christ held in the thinking of the authors of the New Testament. It is my opinion that the *theological* significance of the Resurrection has never yet been studied adequately or taken seriously by Christian theologians. For this reason the Christian faith has usually been characterized by sharp and bitter doctrinal struggles, by historicalness, by sectarian provincialism, and by ecclesiastical institutionalism, because the Church has been more interested in itself than in its mission, more interested in what to say about Christ than in Christ himself, and more interested in power and position than in prayer and contrition.

If this sweeping characterization of the Church is true, and I am sure it is in part, can this be explained because Christians have really never thought seriously of Jesus of Nazareth as now being a Living Presence in their midst, convicting them of sin and guiding them into all truth in the Spirit? Why do Christians desire to preserve the truth in rigid doctrines and dogmas when the Living Truth is now in their very midst? If God *did* speak to men, He is surely *now speaking* to men of faith. This, I take it, is what the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit really implies, although Christians have usually underestimated the place the Holy Spirit holds in the divine economy. In another sense, this book may be regarded as an attempt to deal seriously with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, especially as it relates to the doctrines of reconciliation and salvation.

Another purpose of this study, closely related to the one described above, is to analyze the relationship between the Cross and the Resurrection. Gustaf Aulén says that his work on the history of Christian

doctrine has led him to an ever-deepening conviction that the traditional account of the history of the idea of Atonement is in need of thorough revision (see *Christus Victor*, p. 1). I would agree that the history of the idea of the Atonement needs thorough revision; but I would also go on to say that the *idea* of the Atonement is also in need of thorough revision today, and it is my conviction, based on New Testament study, that the doctrine of the Atonement will receive that needed revision only when the doctrine of the Resurrection is taken as seriously as is the doctrine of the Cross. This book, then, will attempt to show that the authors of the New Testament were in full agreement that the Cross and Resurrection together constitute the grounds of man's reconciliation and salvation or, in other words, the Atonement. The Church has long considered the Cross to be the *one* ground of the Atonement, but this, it seems to me, is not in keeping with the point of view found in the New Testament. The New Testament writers did *not* minimize the place of the Cross to be sure, but neither did they overlook the glorious significance of the Resurrection. Their faith was a Cross-Resurrection faith, and if we consider their teachings authoritative we too should possess such a faith.

But my fundamental purpose in this treatise is not to argue for a particular point of view or to formulate a system of doctrine to be placed over against any other system of doctrine, but rather to call attention to fundamental New Testament teachings that have often been obscured and/or distorted for various reasons. My purpose is to exhort and not to quarrel, and for this reason there is some "preaching" in the book. To assist Christians to recover a dynamic faith for our day and to help provide the theological foundations for a Christian unity for which we all yearn, as did the apostle Paul, are other aspects of my purpose. Arthur H. Compton, the eminent physicist, said, "Science has created a world in which Christianity is an imperative" (cited by Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Living of These Days*, p. 270). But what kind of Christianity? we must ask. We as Christians need to pick up the fragments of a particularized and sectarian Christianity and reshape them and build them into a House (Household) of God which rests "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (*italics added*) (Ephesians 2:19-21). But how shall we be able to build this



"dwelling place of God"? We must build in *Him* and in the *Spirit*, and it is my firm conviction that the dynamic implications of the doctrine of the Resurrection will provide us the theological cornerstones we are needing. Only then shall we be able to meet the challenge of science and all others with a living Christian faith and a living Truth no longer bound by the dogmas and traditions of the past (see David Elton Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 161-202).

The reader will soon detect that the theme of this book has a movement similar to a fugue in a Beethoven symphony, but not manifesting the exactness and precision of that master's works, of course. We have already attempted to state the main theme which recurs again and again with variations until the climax is reached. The climax is supposed to come in the last chapter, and it is my hope that the reader will not be disappointed. The reader will also detect a certain imprecision in the choice of words. This to some extent is deliberate, but of course may be due more than I am aware to my own difficulties in the matter of diction. However this may be, my purpose is not to employ the spotlight overmuch, but rather mostly to use the floodlight so that the whole may be seen rather than the parts. As was stated above, my primary concern is to suggest a broader base for the doctrine of the Atonement, that is, a Cross-Resurrection base rather than a single Cross base. There will undoubtedly be some repetition and overlapping of discussion in the essay, but this is unavoidable.

Paul Tillich's words about Karl Barth here come to mind: "Barth's greatness is that he corrects himself again and again in the light of the 'situation' and that he strenuously tries not to become his own follower." I am certainly not comparing myself with the "greatness" of Barth, but, if I understand my own purposes and motives in writing this essay, I do not want to be understood as being my own follower; but, rather, I want to be understood as being a follower of the *Lord Jesus Christ who is the Spirit*, the One who alone is able to help us remove the "veils" of tradition that often obscure our theological vision (see II Corinthians 3:14-18).

The writer wishes to express hearty thanks to those individuals who have encouraged him to write this book and who have helped him in more ways than he is able to acknowledge or to mention. First of all the author wishes to express gratitude to his dear friends Rayford and Nella Ruth Rogers for graciously permitting him to use their

country home on Pony Hill Ranch in Stone County, Mississippi, as a place for study and writing. Much of the writing of the manuscript was done amid the quietness and the beauty of the rolling pine-covered hills of this countryside. Needed inspiration for the task was found in this lovely retreat. A special word of appreciation goes to Dr. J. B. McMinn, Assistant Professor of Philosophy of Religion at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, who gave valuable assistance in English composition and style, but who is in no way responsible for the deficiencies that are still evident in the text. My wife, Lois, Miss Marjorie Beam, and my efficient secretary, Mrs. Malcolm Harris, assumed the burden of typing the manuscript and of assisting in proof-reading, for which labors I offer my sincere thanks. But after all is said and done, the full responsibility for what is here written is mine and mine alone.

THEODORE R. CLARK

New Orleans  
1959



## Prayer of the Author

O Lord God, our Lord, how excellent is Thy Name in heaven and on the earth. We worship and praise Thee for Thy Love, Wisdom, and Power so graciously revealed in Jesus the Christ. We thank Thee for Thy coming to us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth that Thy reconciling and saving works might be made known to us in his Life and Cross and Resurrection. We pray that the spiritual eyes of our understanding may be opened by Thy Spirit of Truth that we may be able to comprehend the mysterious magnitude of Thy working in our behalf to bring us into a saving fellowship with Thee through the Incarnate Life and Reconciling Death and Saving Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us, Thy wayward and erring children, O Thou Gracious and Loving Sovereign, to hear Thy Voice and to see Thy Light which Thou dost cause to fall upon our winding pathway so that we may be Thy messengers, however imperfect, and Thy lights, however dim, for others along the way. Grant unto us the wisdom, the strength, and the courage we need in our confused and tragic generation to declare unto all men that Life cannot be obtained by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds out of Thy Mouth. Enable us, O Ever-Present Word, to think clearly and to witness effectively in our time so that Thy Kingdom may come and Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Above all, may Thy Holy Spirit be able to break through our resisting pride and our cherishing of traditions and institutions so that we may share more fully in the Community of faith and love which Thou art creating in Jesus Christ the Lord. O God, our Father, help us truly to be Thy children, begotten in spiritual death with Christ on the Cross and raised with him in the Resurrection to walk in the newness of Life Eternal. Help us truly to participate through faith and love in Thy reconciling and saving works which Thou art causing to be realized in our midst through Thy working in the Christ-Spirit so that we may grow up to Thy salvation while working out Thy salvation with fear and trembling. Lead us to be humble before Thee and to be grateful for all Thy blessings. We make our prayer in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord who reconciles us to Thee by his death and saves us by his life. Amen.

## CHAPTER I

# MAN AGAINST GOD

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,  
and done that which is evil in thy sight,  
so that thou art justified in thy sentence  
and blameless in thy judgment.  
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.<sup>1</sup>

The universal cry of the human spirit is echoed in the words "against thee, thee only, have I sinned." Deep in the human spirit lies the awful sense of estrangement, of distance from God. Man awakes to consciousness to find himself *against* God, to find himself "brought forth in iniquity." He has no final explanation for this opposition to God, but gradually, as life unfolds, there comes to him the consciousness of sin and of the rejection of God. He discovers that his very existence in finitude or his being in matter, time, and space constitutes, in part, his estrangement from God. Paul Tillich labels this state of being man's "existential estrangement." "I am not God," man comes to understand. "I am *man*, alone, lost in my own uniqueness, cut off from eternity, from God, from life, from hope," he laments.

Thus man soliloquizes. He can *only* soliloquize. Man must talk *only* to himself. When he talks to others, he is talking *only* to himself. He is isolated, shut up within himself, within the prison of his own mind. What he sees *out there* he sees first *within*. He *knows* because he interprets. He wonders, he analyzes, he plans, he speaks, but like

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 51:4, 5. All subsequent Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version (New York, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1953), copyrighted by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, New Testament Section, 1946, Old Testament Section, 1952.



echoes that finally diminish to stillness in the deep valley, his words and his thoughts become empty and meaningless when they are flung out into the world beyond. His thoughts and his words have meaning only within the limits of his existential predicament. In his own uniqueness he is lost, helpless, and undone.

Man wonders. He is a question raiser. "How came I to this predicament?" he queries. "Who made me thus, and why?" he asks. "Who am I, and what is my purpose or my destiny?" he wonders. He is troubled by these ultimate questions. He demands answers that are beyond him. He is troubled with an "ultimate concern," to use another of Paul Tillich's concepts, but possesses only limited resources with which to cope with his ultimate concern. Because of this predicament he falls inevitably into despair, into anxiety, into flight from God, into resistance against God. In his anxiety man demands answers of himself which he cannot supply. In truth, he cannot understand the questions he asks or must ask. He questions and he quests but he does not know the meaning of his thoughts and actions. In himself, in his own resources and in his own power, he inevitably senses his failure, his missing of the mark, his falling "short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), which "glory" is his true destiny (Hebrews 2:10).

### Falling Short of God's Glory

Man's despair, anguish, and tragic plight result from his standing against God. He not only raises questions that he cannot answer; he also answers questions that he did not raise. In supplying answers, his answers, to questions *he did not ask*, he acts and falls and knows not why he acts and falls. To know the answer, man must know the question. But what is the question? Who must ask it? *Who finally* must answer the question? These are the questions preliminary to all man's questions. But man cannot answer these questions within himself, that is, within his limited range of knowledge. He must look beyond himself. He must hear the Question and the Answer as they come to him from beyond his finitude. He must hear the Word if he is to live and to escape the doom of ultimate despair and tragedy. Jesus the Christ leaves with man a living truth as he quotes an ancient writing: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4).



Man's opposition to God is characterized by an active resistance to God. Lest it be supposed that man's predicament involves only his inability to raise the right questions or to formulate the right answers, it must be made clear that his estrangement from God involves more than the inability to *understand* his plight. Man does *not* understand, it is true. Ultimate questions and answers he is concerned with, but he sees now only "in part," "in a mirror dimly" (I Corinthians 13:12). His falling short of the glory of God involves basically an act of the *will*. His will is set against the will of God. In his existential estrangement man's will becomes for him the final arbiter or the final authority. Any authority outside himself in his isolation becomes for him a threat to his own being, that is, to his own security in existence. The threat of non-being, of nothingness, of annihilation, of unreal "existence" drives him to assert his will against any and all external powers. He must will to exist, yet to will to exist is to will to be estranged from God.

Yet man cannot will not to will. He must will or cease to exist. But the possibility of nonexistence is intolerable to him. Not to exist means the loss of his identity, of his particularity, of his being in finitude. Only in his existential limitation, in his differentiation from other things, can man know himself as man, can he "define" himself and assert himself intelligently, volitionally, and emotionally. In his existential involvement he knows himself as "fallen," as estranged from God. This existential estrangement constitutes whatever element of truth there is in the ancient doctrine of "original sin." Original sin is not a sin or sins that man *has* committed, but rather a prior condition, an "ontological" estrangement that constitutes the ground of his intellectual, volitional, and emotional rebellion against divine authority. God wills man's existence in finitude, that is, man's ontological estrangement which is the ground (or origin) of his sinning, but God does not will man's sinning. Man's sinning is grounded in his refusal to accept himself as limited, or as dependent on the divine will and power. He wants to rule himself or to be his own authority, that is, to be like God (Gen. 3:4), hence not subject to existential estrangement.

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"<sup>2</sup> depicts "exis-

<sup>2</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by Philip Van Doren Stern (New York, The Viking Press, 1945), pp. 247, 249, 251. From *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by James A. Harrison (New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company). Used by permission.



tentially" the ruin that overtakes man in his isolation or self-centeredness, while yet refusing to accept himself in his existential predicament and to seize the "present moment" of opportunity and recognize the guiding light of "ultimate concern," or, in other words, to have faith in God. The unidentified writer of the story (Poe himself?) arrives at the "melancholy House of Usher," a gloomy and ancient mansion, covered with "minute fungi" and surrounded by a tarn and decaying trees. The equestrian visitor vividly imagines that about the whole mansion and domain "there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity—an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn—a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued." Within these gloomy walls lives Roderick Usher and his twin sister, the last of the Ushers. Roderick, who had been the boyhood friend of the writer, had summoned him by letter, "wildly importunate" in nature, to come to his side. "I felt," the visitor lamented, as he entered the mansion, "that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all." He found Roderick alternating between madness and rationality and sensing that his end was near. "I shall perish," the guest reports him as saying, "I must perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results. I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial incident, which may operate upon this intolerable agitation of soul. I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect—in terror. In this unnerved—in this pitiable condition—I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR."

This is the pathetic figure the visitor finds in the house of Usher, one who is broken in body and soul, tortured with guilt, despair, fear, and with the thought of ultimate destruction. The twin sister, his only companion in sorrow, passes into a deathlike swoon or coma, while the guest dwells in this unhappy house. Roderick and his guest place her "dead" body in the mansion's vault, but later, as the guest reads to Roderick the "Mad Trist" of Sir Launcelot Canning, the "oppressive secret" of Roderick comes to light, when the sister, whom they have



buried alive, shatters her wooden coffin and stands bleeding and now dying at the door, "reeling to and fro upon the threshold," and with a "low moaning cry" falls upon the person of her horror-stricken brother and bears "him to the floor a corpse, a victim to the terrors he had anticipated."

A more excellent and dramatic account of the plight of tragic man can hardly be imagined than Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." Roderick Usher, a type of all the Ushers before him, strikingly bears the characteristics of the "aesthete" in Søren Kierkegaard's writings. According to Kierkegaard, the "aesthete" is one who has become "fixed" in the "aesthetic stage" along life's way. He seeks for the meaning and satisfactions of life in external events and things. Accordingly, he fails to develop a moral sense, and this is precisely what Poe says about Roderick Usher in that he displays a "want of moral energy." In the end he meets tragic destruction because he has never learned to accept himself, to live inwardly, to find the liberating and saving power in the "religious stage" that marks the place where the temporal and external, the communal and personal, the desperate and the hopeful, the divine and the human meet in fruitful and loving synthesis. In inwardness is salvation, says Kierkegaard, but it is a purified inwardness that he speaks of, a new birth, accessible only to those who reach the "religious stage" through renunciation, suffering, faith, love, and fellowship with God through Christ in the Spirit. (This line of thinking will accord well with other statements made later in this chapter which advocate a psychological interpretation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and which takes the stages of Dante's pilgrimage [Inferno, Purgatory, Paradise] to be somewhat analogous to Kierkegaard's three stages along life's way [Aesthetic, Ethical, Religious].)

The line of thought opposite to this interpretation of human sin and loss as progressively deteriorating is the line of thought that regards reconciliation and salvation as involving a personal and ethical commitment which must be worked out in suffering, trial, struggle, and faith in response to the suffering mercy and love of God as revealed in Christ. Reconciliation and salvation in this context of thought can never be viewed as legal, temporal, or static, but rather as the New Life, the "New Being" (Paul Tillich), Eternal Life, that is, as a Dynamic Fellowship with God actualized as the believer meets God in

faith within the "existential moment," consequently giving meaning to the past and the future and progressively overcoming the destructive tendency in man's "existential estrangement."

Any "house of Usher" will so fall when the occupants combine demonic self-centeredness with concern for externals, as is illustrated in the Ushers' determination to live within themselves and by themselves, that is, to be their own lords and masters. Roderick saw this tragic end when he cried, "I must perish in this deplorable folly." In like manner will any person or group perish when God is dethroned and when self is enthroned.

### *The Imago Dei*

But why does man desire to be a god within himself or to be his own authority? In short, to use language commonly heard today, why does he either consciously or unconsciously long for "essence" and attempt to renounce "existence"? The answer surely lies in the Biblical doctrine of the *imago dei*, the image of God in man. According to the Biblical story of creation, man exists as a creature bearing the image of God. The *imago dei* constitutes his uniqueness qua man, his essential being, his ultimate possibility as a child of God. Bearing in his "essence" the image of God, man therefore knows himself as a man distinguished from the animals and from the other orders of creation. In his essential Godlike being, man also knows himself as sinner, as one who must die, because of his involvement in existence which is the ground of his estrangement from God and of his resistance against God. Man is the only one who knows he must die because he, as a bearer of the image of God, is the only being in the orders of creation who knows not only the fact of death but also, by revelation, the meaning of death. He knows, because of his dialogue with God, that his existential estrangement or, in other words, his essential being in finitude must end in death, namely, in the shattering of his "ontological" existence (essence-existence).

This knowledge of death in turn constitutes the ground of his "existential anxiety" which marks the meeting place of his existence and essence. His anxiety is both essential and existential. As essential man, bearing the image of God, he knows by revelation, however vaguely and ambiguously in existence, that his true destiny lies in his being



properly related to God the Creator-Father and in his being transformed or fashioned from one degree of glory to another into the likeness (image) of the Lord who is Christ in the Spirit (II Corinthians 3:18). As essential man he knows himself as destined for some ultimate purpose in the plan of God, namely, for a "fellowship in the Spirit" which lies before him as a goal, as a "heaven" prepared for those who by faith see through and beyond this existential estrangement. As essential man he knows himself as a "living" creature who must grow by faith toward some ultimate destiny, toward some as yet unrealized and unknown "existence" where existential estrangement will give way to essential fellowship and where man's "ultimate concern" will yield to some degree of "ultimate realization."

Essential man, bearing the image of God, which constitutes the ground of his ultimate concern, experiences this predicament in anxiety. He knows himself in existential estrangement as falling short of this faraway "glory." He knows that he must struggle on and up the rocky and tortuous slope of the "mount of purgatory" to the "paradise" that lies beyond the peak. The journey of the "soul" is beset on every hand with the "infernos" that would drag "it" down to the depths of icy despair and defeat, but behold!—there is a passageway out of the very depths of hell leading to "purgatory" and "paradise." Man's anxiety is to find that passageway that provides the way out of anxiety, despair, defeat, and tragedy into the ascent that leads ultimately to the Throne of God in the midst of the Sea of Light, where words fail and become empty of meaning and where knowledge gives way to being. Dante's vision discloses this Divine Radiance:

So keenly did the living radiance pierce  
 Into me, that I think I had been undone  
 Had mine eyes faltered, from the light averse.  
 And I recall that with the more passion  
 I clove to it, till my gaze, thereat illumed,  
 With the Infinite Good tasted communion.  
 O Grace abounding, whereby I presumed  
 To fix upon the eternal light my gaze  
 So deep, that in it I my sight consumed!  
 I beheld leaves within the unfathomed blaze  
 Into one volume bound by love, the same  
 That the universe holds scattered through its maze.



Substance and accidents, and their modes, became  
 As if together fused, all in such wise  
 That what I speak of is one simple flame.  
 Verily I think I saw with mine own eyes  
 The form that knits the whole world, since I taste,  
 In telling of it, more abounding bliss.

. . . . .  
 But these my wings were fledged not for that flight,  
 Save that my mind a sudden glory assailed  
 And its wish came revealed to it in that light.  
 To the high imagination force now failed;  
 But like to a wheel whose circling nothing jars  
 Already on my desire and will prevailed  
 The Love that moves the sun and the other stars.<sup>3</sup>

Essential man in his existential estrangement, wandering through the infernos of ignorance, pride, prejudice, and rebellion, is free and responsible. In freedom man's anxiety knows no bounds because of the infinite possibilities in his freedom. Man desires and fears freedom at the same time. He is like the moth attracted to the flame that destroys him. His freedom is a responsibility that he must bear as essential man, yet in his existential finitude his freedom serves as a threat to his well-being. Existential man knows his freedom as bounded, as a cramping limitation which appears as a threat to the realization of his ultimate concern. This drives him to repudiate his freedom even in his assertion of it. In his existence he attempts to throw off the limitations of his freedom, but in so doing he enslaves himself further in his existential estrangement and alienates himself from the divine source of his true freedom.

Man's predicament is precisely this: that in his refusal to accept his "existential" limitations, which refusal itself is grounded in his "essential" freedom, he sets himself up as the guarantor of his freedom or as the ruler over his own destiny. Herein lies the core of meaning in the Biblical doctrine of sin. That is to say, free and responsible man, made in the image of God and intended by God to be "perfect" qua man, that is, as "perfect" as God wills every "human" being to be, misuses

<sup>3</sup> Dante Alighieri, "The Divine Comedy" (Paradiso), *The Portable Dante*, edited by Paolo Milano and translated by Laurence Binyon (New York, The Viking Press, 1947), Canto XXXIII, 76-93, 139-145, pp. 541-544. Used by permission of the Society of Authors, London, and Mrs. Cicely Binyon.

and abuses his God-given freedom and in so doing enslaves himself further in existential estrangement that can end only in self-destroying anxiety and in ultimate spiritual death. Ultimate spiritual death may possibly be defined as the final shattering and "dissolution" of the essential-existential being who is a man (human being), which, in other terms, means that a man may destroy himself (compare John 3:16) *qua* man or cease to exist *qua* man.

Thus, man's glory and shame, victory and defeat, hope and despair, life and death are grounded in the image of God in him which constitutes his essential-existential freedom and responsibility. Man's predicament is paradoxical but not hopeless. In his existential estrangement his case is hopeless, but his estrangement may be and is overcome in the working of God in Jesus the Christ. In Jesus the Christ, the Risen and Reigning Christ, the Eternal Word (Logos), the Eternal Spirit, man the wanderer finds the passageway which leads him out of the icy, enslaving inferno of self-destruction to the ultimately victorious struggle on the "other side of the world" which ascends upward to the glory of God. Man who falls *in himself* may therefore recover himself and his essential being-in-freedom in Christ in whom and by whom the Wisdom and Love and Power of God are being manifested and realized through the Church which is the Body of Christ (Romans 12:5; I Corinthians 10:17; 12:12, 13; Ephesians 1:23; 5:23) and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit (II Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:1).

The subject of man's deliverance from his existential estrangement and sin by the working of God in Jesus the Christ will occupy our attention in subsequent elaboration in this essay. However, it needs to be said in advance of this discussion that man's reconciliation and salvation will not be achieved in total separation from his existential involvement. Essential man must always "exist," even in "heaven." Therefore, a certain degree of existential estrangement will always be his lot, no matter when or where he exists. Man will always be a creature, a "created being," subject to the limitations of created existence, so far as we can tell within our present limited range of conception. We simply cannot conceive of an unlimited man, an essential man without existential limitation. If it is possible for man to destroy himself or to eradicate completely his essential nature within his existential estrangement and sin, apparently his destruction would have to be total. We simply cannot think of man except in terms of his essential-existential



form and nature. If we could envisage an "essential man" apart from existential man the creature, we would not know him as man. We would have to call him by another name, because man, in Biblical and Christian terminology, by definition means essential-existential man, a creature bearing the image of God.

In this chapter I have tried to draw, according to my view, the verbal picture of man's estrangement from God and of man's opposition to God. But man's *againstness* to God cannot be explained wholly in terms of a rational or even volitional rejection of God who is the Ground of man's being or Being-Itself (Paul Tillich). Man's "hostility" to God can only be explained, *ultimately*, in terms of his "ontological predicament." Man's being stands against the Being of God. Man and God can never be identified or lost in any ultimate monism. Man's being is a "made" and "formed" being which is formed according to the "image of God." Man is an "essence" participating in "existence," and but one step from non-essence (non-being), if he abuses and misuses his existence. Yet, in his "existence" he is lost, estranged from God, and defeated before he begins. He is caught in an irreversible existential "fate." He is a tragic figure who, within himself and within his own power, is overwhelmed by finitude and knows no destiny short of ultimate defeat.

But it is precisely in this predicament that man's hope lies, for the Christian doctrines of reconciliation and salvation are rooted in the related doctrines of man's awareness and acceptance of his ontological and existential predicament and of God's reconciling and saving Love which overcomes man's estrangement in Jesus the Christ-Spirit. And, since man's estrangement involves basically the "ontological" dimension, it must be stated in advance that his reconciliation and salvation alike must be understood in terms of this dimension. Hence, the saving Word of God in Christ is both Message and Act, both Truth and Event, both Knowledge and Being. On this "ontological" dimension of the Grace of God we shall think at length in the chapters which are to follow.

## CHAPTER II

### SAVED BY JESUS OF NAZARETH

Each cooing dove and sighing bough  
That makes the eve so blest to me,  
Has something far diviner now,  
It bears me back to Galilee.  
And when I read the thrilling lore  
Of Him who walked upon the sea,  
I long, oh, how I long once more  
To follow Him in Galilee [*italics added*].

The hymn above by Robert Morris, among many others<sup>1</sup> in church hymnals, reveals that among numerous Christians there has appeared a kind of "Jesusolatry," a kind of "Jesus cult" which, while ostensibly attempting to safeguard the truth of the Incarnation, actually distorts the Christian doctrine of Atonement and results in a sentimental and irrelevant "Jesus" worship. F. W. Dillistone has written that Christian theology has apparently come to the end of one era and must now seek to relate itself to the new and modern era. During the nineteenth century of "history" and "historical method," Dillistone argues, Christianity adjusted itself to the historical mood and method. Now that the historical method has had to make room for the "scientific method," Christianity must restudy its position and make whatever readjustment is necessary. We can hardly do better than quote his

<sup>1</sup> Study the following hymns: "How Firm a Foundation," "Jesus Is Passing This Way," "Pass Me Not," "Fade, Fade Each Earthly Joy," "Safe in the Arms of Jesus," "Look to Jesus," "Satisfied with Jesus," "Living for Jesus," "We Would See Jesus," "Jesus, and Shall It Ever Be," "Jesus the Very Thought of Thee," "Jesus My Lord Is Real to Me," "Jesus Saves," "Jesus Is Calling," "Tell It to Jesus," and many others.



words at this point: "It was all too easy for the Christian faith to become too interested in its historical origins, too concerned about its historical continuities, too prepared to encase itself within a particular philosophy of history. An excessive emphasis upon the particular historical character might make it very hard to demonstrate its universal, timeless relevance. A constant preoccupation with the biographical details of the historical Jesus might blind men to the glory and the significance of the transcendent Christ. And, perhaps most serious of all, a change of intellectual climate and social organization in the world at large could easily leave the Church isolated within the tower of history which it had sought so painstakingly to build."<sup>2</sup>

Whether one agrees with Dillistone or not, the fact remains that the Christian movement has been greatly concerned, perhaps too much concerned, as Dillistone writes, with a "back to the Jesus of history" type of theology that has actually resulted in its being "isolated within the tower of history," while history has gone on in another direction. It is now generally understood that the "liberal theology" of the nineteenth century sought to take us back to the "Jesus of history" and engaged in a "quest for the historical Jesus." The details of this quest do not concern us here. Our purpose here is to consider the theological implications of this "quest for the historical Jesus" in so far as the doctrines of reconciliation and salvation are concerned.

We sing:

Yes, Jesus is the Truth, the Way,  
That leads you into rest;  
Believe in Him without delay,  
And you are fully blest.

But what *really* does it mean to "believe in Jesus"? Does "Jesus" really save? This is a crucial question, not only for modern Christians who want to understand their "faith," but also for the future of Christianity. How can "Jesus" who lived almost two thousand years ago save us? How can we go back to

. . . Galilee! sweet Galilee!  
Where Jesus loved so much to be . . .

<sup>2</sup> F. W. Dillistone, "The End of the Historical Era?" *Theology Today*, XIV, 1 (April, 1957), pp. 4, 5. Used by permission.

and "follow Him" there? What actually does this going back signify, this "theology of the past" which finds expression today in so many forms among both "liberals" and "fundamentalists" who go "back to Jesus" for fundamentally different reasons? We shall seek to find answers to the above questions by considering, first, the meaning and significance of the Incarnation, and, second, the inadequacy of a "theology of the Incarnation," as it has been and is being expressed among Christians.

### *Cur Deus Homo?*

Why did God become man or the Word become flesh (John 1:14)? As astounding as this teaching is and as staggering as it is to the imagination, the fact is that the Christian faith stands or falls with the doctrine of the Incarnation. No other religion among men has dared to state so bluntly and so categorically that God became man. No other religion has overcome the fundamental dualism inherent in Greek philosophy and in Far Eastern religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, and so on), as has Christianity in the doctrine of the Incarnation. No other religion has stated so simply and so beautifully the story of the birth of the infant Jesus, the son of Mary by the Holy Spirit, who came to save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). Other religions have had their "founders" and their "teachers" who have gathered followers and trained them to propagate their teachings, but none like Christianity has given unique and special significance to the Founder-Person along with yet apart from his teachings. In Jesus, as Christians generally understand it, the God of Holy Love revealed Himself anew as One who acts in human life and history in order to reconcile the world unto Himself and to save the world from the destructive power of sin.

The awareness of the saving acts of God in history was not new to the Hebrew race of which Jesus was a part. Micah, an ancient prophet of Israel, like many others, was typical of the prophets who called upon the people to remember the saving acts of the Lord in history:

"O my people, what have I done to you?

In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,

and redeemed you from the house of bondage;

and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.



O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised,  
and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,  
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,  
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."

(Micah 6:3-5)

J. B. Phillips has given us a captivating imaginative account of the Incarnation from "the angels' point of view," so that, as he puts it, "it may help us to let the real truth break over us afresh." Verily it takes imagination to grasp the awful truth that God has indeed visited our lowly planet. Phillips' fanciful account of this Visit seen "from the angels' point of view" is movingly told. It is quoted here in part:

Once upon a time a very young angel was being shown round the splendors and glories of the universes by a senior and experienced angel. . . . Finally he was shown the galaxy of which our planetary system is but a small part. As the two of them drew near to the star which we call our sun and to its circling planets, the senior angel pointed to a small and rather insignificant sphere turning very slowly on its axis. . . .

"I want you to watch that one particularly," said the senior angel, pointing with his finger.

"Well, it looks very small and rather dirty to me," said the little angel. "What's special about that one?"

"That," replied his senior solemnly, "is the Visited Planet."

"Visited?" said the little one. "You don't mean visited by—"

"Indeed I do. That ball, which I have no doubt looks to you small and insignificant and not perhaps overclean, has been visited by our young Prince of Glory." And at these words he bowed his head reverently.

"But how?" queried the younger one. "Do you mean that our great and glorious Prince, with all these wonders and splendors of His Creation, and millions more that I'm sure I haven't seen yet, went down in Person to this fifth-rate little ball? Why should He do a thing like that?"

"It isn't for us," said his senior, a little stiffly, "to question His why's, except that I must point out to you that He is not impressed by size and numbers as you seem to be. But that He really went I know, and all of us in Heaven who know anything know that. As to why He became one of them . . . How else do you suppose could He visit them?"

The little angel's face wrinkled in disgust.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that He stooped so low as to become one of those creeping, crawling creatures of that floating ball?"

"I do, and I don't think He would like you to call them 'creeping crawl-

ing creatures' in that tone of voice. For, strange as it may seem to us, He loves them. He went down to visit them to lift them up to become like Him."

The little angel looked blank. Such a thought was almost beyond his comprehension. . . .<sup>3</sup>

An imaginative and fanciful story like the above may not win any laurels for scientific accuracy, but at least in its own way it impresses us with the realization that man, sinful and undone as he is, is not beyond the concern and saving grace of God. Our tiny planet, soiled and marred with ugliness by our rebellion and strife, by our hatred and cruelty, by our shame and perversity is not "off limits" to the Eternal God of Holy Love and Power. The song of an ancient singer in Israel has a fuller meaning in the light of God's concern for man as expressed in the Visit of the Prince of Peace:

When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,  
the moon and the stars which thou has established;  
What is man that thou art mindful of him,  
and the son of man that thou dost care for him?  
(Psalm 8:3,4)

The psalmist goes on to sing about man's exalted place in God's order, but in the light of the Incarnation the words take on added significance. God, we now know, really cares enough for man to come down to him, to stoop to his lowly estate and enter into and share in the struggle of life which is man's. The God who visited the world in Jesus the Christ is none other than the One God, maker and ruler of heaven and earth. He is no stony, motionless Buddha who stares silently and expressionlessly into the infinite distances unmindful of man's tragic plight on this tiny sphere which imprisons him in time and space, but rather the Living God who came into the world, appeared in the person of Jesus, and spoke and acted that all men might be saved from their sins and share in the Life Everlasting. This is the awful truth of the Incarnation!

What further significance is there in this Visit beyond the assertion that God did come and purpose to save man from his sins? In other words, why is God's coming in Jesus the Christ necessarily any different

<sup>3</sup> J. B. Phillips, *New Testament Christianity* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1956), pp. 15-19.



from all other comings of God to men? Perhaps we cannot answer these questions in any categorical fashion, but at least one point can be stressed that is fundamental to all that shall be said in the following chapters concerning God's work in Christ. The Visit of God in Jesus the Christ asserts the fundamental truth that all God's dealings with men are in the nature of a "personal encounter." The God who reveals Himself in Jesus the Christ is not a God who deals with men at arm's length and through impersonal "spirits" or "mediums" (legal codes, priests, scriptures, institutions, and so on), but rather a living and loving Father-God who comes near in the person of Christ the Son and reveals Himself as He who is never far from any one of us. We must conclude, then, that the personal and existential character of the divine-human encounter, which is absolutely basic to any meaningful participation in the Christian faith and life, is the one all-inclusive truth which comes to us out of the fact of the Incarnation.

Much thought has gone into the attempt to understand the relationship between the Incarnation and the Cross of Jesus. In the Middle Ages Anselm developed a rational explanation, *a priori*, of the Cross by raising the question *Cur Deus Homo?* The title of the book indicates that Anselm intended to explain why the Incarnation was necessary. He concluded that Jesus the Son of God had to become man in order that he might pay man's debt and satisfy the offended honor of God, thus making it possible for God to act graciously in man's behalf without compromising His divine honor. But this approach to the meaning of the Incarnation loses its significance when the meaning of the Cross is sought in an entirely different context of thought. However, this line of thought will have to wait for discussion until later on in this essay. It is sufficient to state at this point that the meaning of the Incarnation does not depend upon any *direct* or *exclusive* reference to the Cross as such. One must go *beyond* the Cross, if the fullest meaning of the Incarnation is to be found.

### The Theology of the Incarnation

Tell me the story of Jesus,  
Write on my heart every word;  
Tell me the story most precious,  
Sweetest that ever was heard. . . .

Fasting alone in the desert,  
 Tell of the days that are past,  
 How for our sins he was tempted,  
 Yet was triumphant at last. . . .

The above well known and often used hymn by Fanny J. Crosby illustrates very clearly one exceedingly important aspect of the "theology of the Incarnation," that is, the romantic and often quite sentimental stress on the past. This hymn in particular is significant, for, while it looks back with touching reverence to the "days that are past," it nevertheless has great range in that it relates important events in the life of Jesus beginning with his birth and ending with his Resurrection. But, even though it tells "how He liveth again," the main emphasis is upon these past events, a "story most precious" which tells of the Love that "paid the ransom for me." The principal objection to a hymn of this kind is not that it reminds us of the past as such, but that it tends to leave the impression that the ground of our reconciliation and salvation is to be found in the past, that is, in past events per se which must be repeated over and over again in story form lest we forget.

. . . Tell me the story often,  
 For I forget so soon,  
 The "early dew" of morning  
 Has passed away at noon.<sup>4</sup>

Another objection to the "theology of the past" involves the principle of "repetition" which serves as a kind of "pump priming" process designed to keep alive a story or a record, as though this were the only consideration of worth. Unrecognized by many is the hidden assumption in this line of thought that the responsibility belongs to man to see that the story is never forgotten. Man must remember the story or be lost. This entails, at least in some degree, the thought that men must save themselves by remembering the story and passing it on in exact language to others. Arising out of this concern to remember and tell a story have come set patterns of thought and activity that have characterized the history of the Christian Church. From the very beginning this pattern is clearly noticeable. In the New Testament there is mention of the "tradition" passed on from one Christian to another (compare II Thessalonians 3:6). Paul sometimes admonishes his fel-

<sup>4</sup> Hymn by Katherine Hankey, "Tell Me the Old, Old Story."



low Christians to "stand firm and hold to the traditions" which he taught them "either by word of mouth or by letter" (II Thessalonians 2:15).

Yet, Jesus and the writers of the New Testament often warned against the uncritical allegiance of the people to the "traditions of the elders" (Matthew 15:1-9; Colossians 2:8; Galatians 1:14) by which they were obstructing the true Word and work of God. Is Christianity to be understood as the mere substitution of one set of traditions (II Thessalonians 2:15) for another (Matthew 15:1-9)? Evidently many Christians think so because of their insistence that correct propositions, creeds, rituals are *in themselves absolutely essential* to Christianity. A "theology of the past" always, it seems, leads to this "fixing" of thought and action in externals, whether in words or in actions ("holy" scriptures, creeds, rituals).

This "fixing" psychology among Christians constitutes a serious threat to the very survival of Christianity. Actually this study throughout will entail a critical analysis of the "theology of the past," and then will come to a close with what the writer hopes will prove to be the beginning of a new approach or the emergence of a perspective that will provide some answers to old problems and some fresh insights into the nature of Christianity. The writer is humbly willing to assert at this point that a fresh reading of the New Testament from this "new" perspective will provide a depth and dynamic to the Christian faith that will at once reform and revolutionize the "faith once for all delivered to the saints" and make Christianity more relevant to the spiritual, ethical, and social needs of men.

A concomitant of the "theology of the Incarnation" is the "theology of the work of Jesus." From the earliest days of the Christian movement its interpreters have regarded the works of Jesus as truly indicative of the mighty works of God. Great attention is given to the works of Jesus in the New Testament, to his teachings, his miracles, and his death especially. But his birth and Resurrection are viewed, significantly enough, not as *his* works but as the works of *God the Father through the Holy Spirit*. A common error on the part of many Christian thinkers has been to divorce the work or works of Jesus from the Person himself. Of course, few will really admit that they have been guilty of this, but Christian history reveals that this tendency has not only been quite in evidence but also has actually led time



and again to a serious distortion of Christian faith and practice. Much of the remainder of this book will deal with this tendency and resultant distortion of Christian truth. An attempt will be made later to show how these distorting interpretations were based, for the most part, on isolated passages in the New Testament with a corresponding neglect of a larger context of thought implied if not actually stated.

In the early centuries of the Christian movement, for example, there was a reaction against what might be called the dominant "Pauline mysticism" of the New Testament era. Paul had stressed in no uncertain terms that men are justified by faith alone and not by the works of the law. His teachings were sometimes misunderstood and perverted either into gnostic forms of Christianity or into anti-nomianism, both of which were abhorrent to Paul himself (compare Colossians 2:8-15; Romans 5:20-6:2; and so on). As the Christian movement spread into the Greco-Roman world, it was inevitable that it come to terms with its new environment. The early Church fathers, many of whom were Greek in background and thought, naturally began to think of the Christian faith as a body of truth or as a system of rational propositions drawn largely from the teachings of Jesus. Coupled with this rationalizing tendency was the Hebrew (and Roman) concern with "law" and "commandments." Hence there arose in this very early period the conception that Christian teaching was the "new law" (*nova lex*) which must be accepted as the new legal code of the new religion—Christianity. In this way the "teachings of Jesus" were divorced from the Person of Jesus the Christ. Then, too, Jesus had not only *said* much; he had also *done* much by way of performing miracles and setting up the foundations of the Church. Therefore, in this early period of Christian formation and expansion, the need for a more concrete form of Church life was stressed. Had not Jesus founded the Church and given its keeping into the hands of his apostles? Did they not establish more churches and formulate the doctrines so as to spread the movement to the "uttermost parts of the earth"? Did this Church not need an authoritative body of teaching and an authoritative ministry to build up and preserve the Church in the world? These were practical questions forced upon the Church by geographical expansion and by contact with foreign philosophies and religions.

Thus, an authoritative canon and creed were formulated in these



early centuries, drawn up and interpreted by the authorities, that is, the clergy, who were looked upon as the successors to the apostles themselves. The mediation of Christ's work of reconciliation and salvation to men became the business and the task of this Church, this authoritarian institution. The development was further enhanced by the formulation of Church teachings not explicitly found in the accepted Scriptures, namely, sacramental views of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Very early in Christian history the conception of Baptism as a "means of grace" absolutely essential to salvation was adopted by the Church. Accompanying this was the view that in the elements of the Lord's Supper the grace of God was mediated to the participant. An early form of "transubstantiation" was thus formulated almost before the ink was dry on the pages of the New Testament. Much of the development in the opening centuries of the Christian era, then, is obviously foreign to certain main features of the New Testament record. The reasons for and the causes of this development lie, it seems clear, in the tendency of the early Christians to separate the works of Jesus (teachings, miracles, death, and so on) from the Person of Jesus as the Christ, which separation in itself also involved an isolating of certain works and events as though they had power and meaning *in themselves* apart from other events.

We have seen how the early Church went back to the teachings and works of Jesus and sought to base its theology upon canon, creed, and church (clergy) in an effort to preserve this legacy. In spite of the insights of some of the early Church fathers who at times saw beyond this particularism (for example, Irenaeus, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, and others), the dominant theology was largely a theology of the Incarnation preserved for the most part in the doctrines of the Church. Even when the Logos doctrine was stressed by these early Christian thinkers it was to emphasize that the Logos, the Eternal Truth, the Pure Revelation, the Word, had taken up its *abode* in the historical Jesus. The Logos had become flesh in Jesus, who, by his teachings and works, had not only laid down for them the "new law," but also had redeemed them by his death, and by his death and Resurrection had defeated the powers of evil. As yet there was little awareness of the Risen Christ, *reigning and returning* to work among the peoples of the world in the Holy Spirit of God. Later in this essay we shall have more to say about the neglect of the doctrine

of the Holy Spirit in this early age and in all ages of the Church, except perhaps in the present age.

The above analysis is surely a good example of oversimplification, when one considers the full historical development of the "theology of the Incarnation" in the Church. Such a full analysis was not intended in this case. Obviously there is much more to be desired if the full story of the "Jesus cult" type of theology is to be told. What has been the one concern in this section is to show with a few illustrations what has happened and what is still happening in Christian thinking with regard to the "theology of the past."

The following chapter will deal in more detail with another aspect of this "theology of the Incarnation," this "theology of the past." Mention has been made above of the attempt to isolate a work of Jesus and give this work a special and even *unique* significance in connection with the doctrines of reconciliation and salvation. This has very clearly been the case with regard to the death of Jesus on the Cross. For many Christians the death of Jesus on the Cross is *the* event that *alone* constitutes the ground of our reconciliation and salvation. This is *the* work which alone wins for us the saving grace of God. To this exceedingly important subject we now turn our attention.



### CHAPTER III

## SAVED BY THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

What can wash away my sin?  
    *Nothing but the blood of Jesus;*  
What can make me whole again?  
    *Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

Oh! precious is the flow  
    That makes me white as snow;  
No other fount I know,  
    *Nothing but the blood of Jesus [italics added].*

The "nothing but" of the above hymn by Robert Lowry is indicative of a "theology of the Cross" which has led, I think, to a most serious distortion of the Christian faith. Countless hymns have been written and sung, innumerable books have been published and read, and myriads of sermons have been preached to attentive audiences to the effect that salvation is to be found in the "blood of the Lamb" or in the "Cross of Jesus." Multitudes have been urged to

" . . . cling to the old rugged cross,  
    And exchange it some day for a crown."<sup>1</sup>

Many intricate and even repugnant "theories of the Cross" have been formulated to explain the "meaning of the Cross" to those who are concerned with understanding this "work of Jesus" for the reconciliation of man to God and the saving of men's souls from death and hell. The assumption has been that *this* work, Jesus' death on the Cross, stands alone or is at least more important than other aspects of the Total Event of Jesus as the Christ. For example, few books on the

<sup>1</sup> "The Old Rugged Cross," words and music copyright 1913. Renewal 1941. The Rodeheaver Co., owner. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Cross reveal more insight into the meaning of the Cross than does P. T. Forsyth's *The Cruciality of the Cross*, but it is at least an open question as to whether the Cross is any more crucial or central than any other event in the total work of God in Christ. This study is intended to deal precisely with this question and also with other related questions, such as the place that the Resurrection of Christ, the Church, the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit have in the saving works of God.

Before going further with this discussion, let the writer state very clearly that he does not intend to minimize in any way the importance of the Cross as *such*. The attempt here is to determine the *relative* place and importance the Cross holds in the *entire* work of God in Christ. The writer does think that an *undue* stress has been placed on the Cross which has resulted in a misconception and misapplication of the Christian faith on the part of some. This chapter will deal with the "theology of the Cross" developed during the New Testament period.

### The Cross in the New Testament

Does the New Testament teach in unequivocal terms that man's salvation is grounded *solely* in the death of Jesus on the Cross? Evidently countless Christians thus interpret the New Testament. How, therefore, does one account for this disproportionate emphasis on the Cross? Why did the disciples of Jesus and others in the dawn of Christianity see so much in the death of Jesus on the Cross? Did *they* distort the Christian faith from its beginning, or have later Christians misunderstood the "founders" of the movement and forced their teaching into unchristian molds? These are far-reaching questions and deserve careful consideration.

It is obvious even to the casual reader of the New Testament that the Cross is a basic theme in the New Testament. But how is this theme presented? From what perspective is it viewed by the writers of the New Testament? Is it ever treated as though it stands in isolation from all other events or from the Person of Christ? Sometimes it seems that it is thus treated. Why? Perhaps the answer lies in the ambivalence with which the writers of the New Testament present the Cross. At times their attention seems to be focused directly upon



the Cross without any specific statement about the larger context from which it must be viewed. At other times the Cross is viewed from the larger context of the total work of God in Christ. It will be the purpose of this chapter to illustrate this ambivalent approach to the Cross in the New Testament. It is hoped that the evidence thus produced will go far toward correcting the one-sided "theology of the Cross" that has flourished so long in the Christian Church.

### The Cross in the Gospels

All the Gospels give a place of prominence to the crucifixion of Jesus. The accounts vary somewhat in the details, but a rather clear picture of the suffering of Jesus on the Cross can be obtained from all. Yet, there is surprisingly little in the Gospels by way of discussion concerning the "meaning of the Cross" as such. Therefore, one may at least raise the question as to whether it has any meaning *in itself*. Perhaps this is why the Gospel writers were more interested in telling the story than in giving the meaning of the events themselves. However, there are a few passages in the Gospels which do appear to deal with the meaning of the death of Jesus *in itself*. It needs to be said also that there are textual problems involved in some of the passages to be considered, but we shall not be concerned with these problems *per se*. They are important to be sure, but this book has to do largely with what the New Testament as a whole teaches and not with what a verse or passage here and there teaches on any subject.

Three Gospel writers and Paul record the statements attributed to Jesus at the Last Supper with his disciples before his crucifixion (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; I Corinthians 11:23-26). Here Jesus is reported to have said that his body would be broken and his blood shed for the remission of their sins. The bread and wine were evidently used as a kind of object lesson by which Jesus attempted to illustrate his teachings at this point. The cup of wine signified his blood of the (New) Covenant poured out for them. Evidently Jesus had in mind the New Covenant spoken of by Jeremiah centuries before his time. This New Covenant was to have been written in the heart and not upon tables of stone. The New Covenant was to be a work of God performed in the heart of man and not imposed upon him as a legal code as before by Moses. This New

Covenant was to be given "for the forgiveness of sins," and, as the term "forgiveness" indicates, was to show that Jesus' work was not to operate in the realm of law, but rather on the basis of God's grace.

Admittedly, the words of Jesus at the Last Supper are obscure and difficult to understand in themselves. But in the light of other teachings of Jesus we can at least assume that Jesus was not thinking of his death as a mechanical, legal "sacrifice" offered by man or by himself to appease the wrath of God. Jesus was, we would argue, trying to impress upon his disciples that he was going to die "for them" and for "the many" and that his death would be one aspect of the reconciliation which God was accomplishing in him. Just exactly how God would forgive men on the basis of the blood of the New Covenant was not at all made clear at the Last Supper. Jesus simply asserted at that time that his broken body and shed blood should be considered as integral aspects of the New Covenant which the God of "forgiveness" was revealing in him as the Christ. What this might mean would have to be determined in the light of later developments, that is, in the light of the Total Event of God's Work in Christ.

This Total Event can be understood at least in part in the light of the historical revelation of God in Jesus as the Christ; but before one can understand the cosmic or universal elements in the message of the New Covenant, one must rise above the purely historical order of matter, time, and space and see the work of God in the historical Jesus as a particularizing of the Way in which God always works in history and among men. And before one can see this in the New Testament revelation, he must move beyond the Cross to the Resurrection. The clue to the meaning of God's reconciling and saving works lies in the doctrine of the Cross-Resurrection and not in the doctrine of the Cross alone. What Jesus therefore had to say at the Last Supper concerning his death as such must be understood finally in the light of what he said before and after the Cross. Let us now turn our attention to a teaching of Jesus spoken some time before his death.

Jesus frequently employed paradox in his teachings. For example, he taught that a person must become blind in order to see, must become a servant if he is to become a master, must give up if he is to receive, must die if he is to live. One such important teaching is recorded by Matthew (16:24-28). This passage is important because,



if there is a teaching of Jesus that furnishes something of a "rationale" of the Cross in the Gospels, it is this particular teaching. Jesus' teachings are varied on this subject, but perhaps this one passage will serve to illustrate the point under consideration.

Before Jesus died on the Cross he foresaw what was ahead for him because he knew what often happened to those who were condemned by the Roman authorities. His disciples also understood that the cross used by the Romans for execution of criminals was a symbol of death and tragedy. Jesus, therefore, could refer to the cross, in teaching his disciples the way of self-denial, as the symbol of the death one must die before he becomes a follower of the Christ. With the Roman cross as a symbol of death Jesus could say to his disciples with meaning: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:24, 25). In this way he prepared them for his death and also furnished them with something of an explanation of the "meaning of the Cross." Before they could live with him, they too must die on *their* crosses. The way of life was through death, death to self, self-denial.

It is understandable that this sort of talk was enigmatical to the disciples. (It was only after the death and Resurrection of Jesus that teachings like this would have full meaning.) How could they follow one who was dead? Even the passage under discussion indicates that the point of view is from the standpoint of life (Resurrection) and not from the standpoint of death (Cross). The one who will "lose his life" will "find it." In this same context of thought Jesus discusses the coming of the Son of man in the glory of his Father and asserts that there were some standing there "who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." This line of thought points definitely beyond the Cross to the Resurrection and Reign of Christ. Then, too, in the very next chapter, the story of the Transfiguration is told, with Jesus appearing in glory with Moses and Elijah and discussing the "exodus" that Jesus was to "accomplish" in Jerusalem (compare Luke 9:31). Shortly after this dazzling demonstration, Jesus tells his disciples in plain language that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of men and slain and that on the third day he would be raised from the dead (Matthew 17:22, 23).



It would surely be unreasonable to suppose that Matthew only accidentally wove the teachings about the Cross and Resurrection together in this section of his Gospel. Actually, it appears safe to say that all the writers of the New Testament viewed the Cross from the standpoint of the Resurrection. No Gospel writer closes with the account of Jesus' death, but continues with the story of his Resurrection. In every case where the Cross of Jesus is discussed, by anticipation or in retrospect, there are indications that the Risen Christ supplies whatever meaning is being attached to the death of Jesus at that point. Earlier in this treatise it was shown that there is an ambivalence of expression as regards the Cross in the New Testament. Sometimes, when the Cross is directly in the line of vision, it seems that for the writer there is meaning in it alone,<sup>2</sup> but the larger context of his thought will show that this is not the case.

The passage cited above (Matthew 16:24-17:23) illustrates what has just been said. This passage connects self-denial (crucifying self) and salvation (following Jesus) with the glory of the Resurrection. How could the disciples understand the gaining of life by the losing of life apart from the victory of the Resurrection? Such paradoxical teachings would have been forever meaningless, if the Resurrection had not taken place.

Likewise, the statement of Jesus during the Last Supper concerning his "blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" is followed immediately with a statement that clearly points beyond the Cross to the Resurrection (Matthew 26:29). Usually this passage is not considered when the "theology of the Last Supper" is under consideration, but this writer thinks that its significance should not be overlooked. When the question is raised as to what the blood of Jesus has to do with the forgiveness of sins, the answer often finds expression in a "theory of the Atonement (Cross)," designed to explain how *this particular* work of Jesus serves as a "ransom for many," as a "satisfaction" to the honor of God, or as a substitution for the sinner's death, and so on. But all such theories, I argue, are plainly beside the point. They assume that the Cross of Jesus is the *only* ground of man's reconciliation and salvation, but in so doing they manifestly ignore much in the New Testament that would give the Cross the dynamic it lacks. In Matthew 26:29 Jesus is reported to

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Galatians 6:14; Hebrews 2:9; I Corinthians 2:2.



have said, "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus was evidently telling his disciples that, even though he would soon give up his life for them, he would have fellowship again with them in his Father's kingdom. His death would be followed by his Resurrection, and the fellowship they now had with him during the Last Supper would be resumed in his risen state. He would be with them as an abiding Presence to guide them and empower them in the days ahead. They would not depend upon his death as a work to save them, but rather would depend upon him, the Risen Christ, to be the saving Presence and Power in their lives.

Obviously the above interpretation extends beyond the limits of the one verse cited above (Matthew 26:29), but in the light of later developments the interpretation offered is quite plausible. Just as Jesus' words about his broken body and shed blood did not explain in detail precisely how his death would result in divine forgiveness, just so these words about the renewed fellowship with his disciples in his Father's kingdom did not contain any specific information as to how this divine forgiveness through Jesus the Christ would become a saving Presence and Power in their lives. Later teachings and events would make this more explicit. With this line of thought we shall deal later.

According to Matthew (27:41, 42) the chief priests, the scribes, and elders mocked Jesus on the Cross, saying: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him." Even though this was spoken in derision, the enemies of Jesus spoke the truth concerning him. He could not save himself, if he would save others. Here is a clue to the "meaning of the Cross." Jesus was willing to give himself that others might live. What he was giving here was not his life as such, but himself as such. Jesus knew that he must sacrifice himself, if he would save others. This means that all the pain, anguish, despair, and sorrow of another due to his sinful pride and rebellion must be "taken upon oneself" before the stricken one can be saved. There is really no other way to "rescue the perishing" but by sacrificial love, concern, and care. This in principle lies deep within the meaning of the Cross.

The enemies of Jesus demanded that he come down at that moment from the Cross and they then would believe in him. He did not come down from the Cross at their bidding, but he did come forth



from the grave on the third day. Even in the midst of the terrible hours of Jesus' death, a preview of the Resurrection is given, according to Matthew's Gospel. (Matthew alone gives the account of the shaking of the earth and the raising of the saints from the dead at the moment of Jesus' expiration. Whether this is authentic history or Matthean interpretation is beside the point. It indicates at least that not even the death of Jesus could be described without some reference to the Resurrection.) *In the midst of Death there is Life at work.* This, I think, is what Matthew is attempting to say in this unique and obscure passage. And by some strange paradox this is at least in part the meaning of the Cross. Life is in Death. One must die on the cross of self-denial (Jesus) or be "crucified with Jesus" (Paul), if one is to enter into the Life of God. In dying to self, one rises to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-11). And, as we shall later see, it is the Living God who brings Life out of Death. It was so with Jesus, and it is so with the believer. The Living God who reconciles us to Himself and saves us by His Power is none other than the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead and who now saves us through the Living, Reigning Christ. So, once again we assert that no work of God in history as such reconciles and saves us, but rather it is God Himself who works through the Risen Christ who is the Spirit.

There are two sayings of Jesus spoken after the Resurrection (during the appearances) which are of great importance. They are the "great commission" recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 and the teachings concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit in John 20:22; Acts 1:5, 8, and so on. These passages will be considered at length in later chapters. But a question to be posed here, though not answered at this point, is: What relationship exists between the promised Presence of Christ (Matthew 28:20) and the Power of the Holy Spirit at work within the believer and in the Church (John 20:22; Acts 1:5, 8, and so on)?

### The Cross in the Epistles

It does not lie within the purpose or limits of this essay to treat exhaustively the doctrine of the Cross in all the Epistles. Only certain passages in a few Epistles will be considered. The primary purpose here is to illustrate with a few key passages a line of interpretation which, owing to the "theology of the Cross," has often been obscured.



At least the writer hopes to show that one dimension of the ambivalent approach to the Cross in the New Testament involves the assertion that the Resurrection is an integral part of the doctrine of the Atonement and that it is misleading to separate the Cross from the Resurrection in any radical way. In fact, it seems evident that when the constellatory nature of New Testament teachings is taken into consideration no one event or aspect of the working of God in Christ can have any meaning or efficacy in isolation from all other events and aspects. The Total Event and no less must be constantly kept in view. What constitutes the Total Event will be made more explicit in a later section of this essay.

Since Paul wrote a large portion of the New Testament, one should naturally expect him to furnish much of the teaching concerning the Cross of Jesus. In fact, it is true that most of the comment on the Cross in the New Testament does come from Paul. We shall, therefore, give considerable attention to Paul's thought on the Cross. But before we analyze his thinking on the Cross, we need to recall what was said earlier concerning the ambivalence with which the writers of the New Testament view the Cross. Paul especially illustrates this ambivalence. For example, at times he seems to be looking at the blood (death, the Cross) as such as a thing or an event which *in itself* would bring expiation (Romans 3:25), justification (Romans 5:9), reconciliation and peace (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 2:13-16), redemption and forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7), and so on. But to assume that Paul is separating the event from the Person is to miss his point altogether. Even in the passages (and in their context) where Paul seems to be viewing the Cross as an end in itself, he makes it clear that it is not the blood, the death, the Cross as such as a work that constitutes the ground of man's reconciliation and salvation, but rather the Person, the Christ, who reconciles and saves. Note, for example, in the passage last cited (Ephesians 1:7) that Paul avers that our redemption and forgiveness are *in him, in Christ*, through *his* blood. This point has special significance in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians; for, if Paul stresses the Resurrection and Reign of Christ anywhere, he does so in this letter. Note also a similar emphasis in Colossians 1:14. In this passage Paul writes about redemption and forgiveness, but makes *no special reference* to the blood as such. He centers his thought on the Person "in whom we have redemption, the



forgiveness of sins," following with that magnificent statement on the Exalted Christ as the Head of the Church, in whom all the Fullness of God dwells and *through whom* God works "to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:15-20).

Another passage that clearly illustrates Paul's ambivalence concerning the Cross is found in Romans 5:9-11, 18. Let us deal first of all with Verse 18. A quite literal translation of the Greek text would run as follows: "So then as by one trespass (falling aside) condemnation resulted for all men, thus also by one act of righteousness justification of life resulted for all men." Taking this verse in isolation one might assume that Paul is saying that all men are condemned by one act of sin on Adam's part and saved by one act of righteousness (the Cross?) on the part of Jesus. But a closer look at the larger context shows that Paul is not reducing the saving work of God to a single act of righteousness. He is referring to "persons," not "acts" or "events" as such. That is to say, he is comparing Christ with Adam and asserting that man's reconciliation with God comes through the Lord Jesus Christ. In dealing with the two themes of reconciliation and salvation, his perspective is very broad. He always views these themes from the standpoint of God's working in the Person of Jesus as the Christ, not limiting his range of vision at any time to the historical Jesus as such and certainly not to any *given act* of the Jesus of history. While pointing to the historical event of Jesus as the Christ, Paul's "God was in Christ - reconciling the world to himself" (II Corinthians 5:19) points also beyond history, back to God Himself, and forward to the continuous activity of God in the Risen Christ through the Holy Spirit in the Church. This is Paul's *magnificent perspective viewed sub specie aeternitatis* which breaks forth in deathless language in passages such as are found in Romans 3:21-23; 5:1-6:11; 8:1-39; 10:4-13; I Corinthians 15:12-28; Ephesians 1:3-23; 2:13-22; Philippians 2:1-13; Colossians 1:13-20, and so on.

No matter how much importance one may attach to the death of Jesus with regard to the *whole purpose* of God in reconciling the world to Himself, he should never interpret Paul as regarding the Cross as an act of righteousness as such that merits salvation for those who accept this act as a "ransom," "satisfaction," or "substitute" for their sinful condition. Paul devoted his life to liberating the Christian



faith from the rationalism and legalism of the Jews, from which background he himself had come. Even though he might have used language which appears to present the Cross as a moralistic and sacrificial act of appeasement to render God favorable to man, as for example in Ephesians 5:2, where he writes that Christ "gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God," we must see that such language is only a part of Paul's mental habit and should not be pressed too far. Paul engaged in great flexibility of expression, especially in dealing with the Cross and the Resurrection.

If it is true that Paul grounded his doctrine of reconciliation in Christ and not in the Cross as such, how are we to understand Paul's many references to the Cross as such? What was Paul's view of the Cross and what part does it play in the over-all reconciling work of God in Christ? That is a fair question and must not be avoided. The easiest way out would be to say that Paul's ambivalence of expression at times amounted to contradiction, but this would be an extreme position in the light of the text of the New Testament. There are some "extreme" statements that may appear to border on contradiction. Compare, for example, Paul's "I decided to know *nothing* among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Corinthians 2:2) and his "far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14) with his "if Christ has not been raised, your *faith* is *futile* and you are *still in your sins*" (I Corinthians 15:17) to see the full force of his striking ambivalence. To see "contradiction" in these expressions, as one would have to admit were he interpreting Paul to be referring to acts or events in the life of Jesus as such, is to overlook the fact that Paul apparently always regards the Cross-Resurrection as the One Event which furnishes the clue to the meaning of God's reconciling and saving work among all men, even though he does not always make this explicit in his writings.

If we may thus separate Paul's thinking on the Cross from his thinking on other aspects of God's work in Christ, what do we discover? Paul makes it very clear that the Cross is first, last, and always the work of God (Romans 3:21-26; II Corinthians 5:19). In I Corinthians 1:17, 18, 24; 2:4, 5, the Power of the Cross is the Power of God at work in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. In the Cross God demonstrates His love and righteousness (Romans 3:25; 5:8), that is, makes manifest His righteousness "apart from law" (Romans 3:21) and



thereby rescues helpless man from sin and death, from the wrath of God (Romans 5:6-11). At no time does Paul see the work of Christ as essentially different from or in conflict with the work of God, even though at times Paul does speak of the work of God and of the work of Christ without making explicit the connection. For example, in Romans 5:9, he writes that we shall be saved *by him* (Christ) from the *wrath of God*. Here Paul is implying, I think, that Christ works for man against the wrath of God.

Two other passages, both seemingly implying a kind of radical tension between God and Christ, are found in Paul's writings. They read as follows: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (II Corinthians 5:21), and "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree' . . ." (Galatians 3:13). On the basis of these two passages, Paul has often been interpreted as teaching that God "punished" Jesus in order to satisfy His divine honor or justice before man's sins could be forgiven, or at least "substituted" Jesus in the sinner's stead so that the punishment due the sinner would fall upon Jesus. Thus Paul's "he made him to be sin who knew no sin" and his "having become a curse for us" are understood as the visiting of God's wrath upon the sinless and lowly Son of God. Incidentally, what this sort of exegesis implies concerning the nature of God is hardly evident to those who thus drive a wedge between God the Father (judicial wrath) and the Son (meek and mild, God's dear child). Such an interpretation calls for two Gods, one strong and one weak, one who sacrifices and one who is sacrificed.

But an altogether different approach to these troublesome verses is possible. I would argue that the "curse" which Christ became for us is the curse of "the law" and not a curse which God the Father placed upon His Son. Paul often spoke of "the law" as though it were an enemy of man (II Corinthians 3:6; Galatians 3:10) and of Christ (Galatians 3:13). At other times he regarded the law as holy, just, and good (Galatians 3:21; Romans 3:31; 7:12). But there is a noticeable ambivalence in Paul's thinking on this subject. Even though Christ became a curse for us, the curse of the law, in Colossians 2:14, Paul writes that Christ "canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands," setting it aside and "nailing it to the cross." How



could Christ both become the curse of the law and at the same time cancel it and nail it to his Cross as a sign of his victory over it? The only possible solution to this apparent "contradiction" lies, I think, in Paul's "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." The reason Paul could think of Jesus as becoming the curse of the law for men and at the same time canceling the law and nailing it to his Cross was that Paul did not distinguish radically between the work of God and the work of Jesus. Jesus could both die under the curse of the law and win a victory over it at the same time because God, the Eternal Father who was in Christ, not only established the law, but also could set it aside in mercy, grace, and love. This is why Paul could say with utter confidence that now (in Christ) the righteousness of God *apart from law* has been manifested. In other words the God who demands (law) is also the God who gives (grace).

The other troublesome verse cited above (II Corinthians 5:21) has likewise led many to adopt lines of thought basically at variance with the "God was in Christ" theme in Paul's writings. Some have interpreted Paul to mean that God treated or regarded Jesus as *though he were a sinner* even though he was not a sinner in order that he might bear the burden of man's sin and guilt and pay the ransom price to secure man's salvation. But this, I think, is fanciful exegesis! If God were to treat Jesus as *though he were a sinner*, yet not a sinner, why could he not also regard any man as *though he were not a sinner*. If it were only a matter of make-believe on God's part, why could not God have made-believe in some other way and spared Jesus the suffering of the Cross? Obviously this kind of approach to the passage does make Paul appear to fall into contradiction. This writer, however, cannot help believing that *too much* has been read into this verse. Possibly Paul intended nothing more here than a passing reference to the Incarnation itself. God made Jesus to be sin for us in the sense that his coming into this world of flesh, sin, and death brought him into direct contact with man's existential predicament of sin. This is no make-believe game that God is playing with Himself, but a real struggle with the forces of sin and death on the actual field of battle.

Possibly Paul was expressing the same idea but in another way in Philippians 2:8, when he wrote: "And being found *in human form* he *humbled himself* and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (*italics added*). This being found in human form was likely



equivalent to the being made sin in II Corinthians 5:21. This is certainly a much more plausible view in the light of Paul's theology as a whole. In closing our discussion on these troublesome passages in Paul's writings, we should assert again that all such shadowy conflicts which seem to grow out of Paul's ambivalence of expression concerning the relationship of God to Christ in the Cross disappear under the full force of Paul's matchless "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." Many "theologies of the Cross" are reduced to fiction when this inspired insight of Paul becomes the final test of the system.

Paul's ambivalence of expression is also noticeable when he deals with the results of the Cross in relation to the believer himself. He writes (as indicated above) that justification, reconciliation, redemption, forgiveness, and so on, are all in some way to be related to the Cross, but he does not elaborate at *that* point on *how* the Cross achieves this. The answer Paul gives to the *how* of the efficacy of the Cross lies in his doctrine of "crucifixion with Christ" (Romans 3:25; 6:3, 4-11; Galatians 2:20; 6:14; Philippians 3:10, and so on). Paul knows that the Cross is God's work just as he knows that the Incarnation and the Resurrection are also His work, but he does not know how to "explain" this work in so many words. In fact, he sometimes comes close to contradiction, when he attempts to analyze the Cross or present a rationale of it.

Actually, he does not seem to have any special interest in explaining the Cross. His interest, rather, is in "experiencing" the Cross, that is, in dealing with the Cross existentially. In other words, Paul is primarily concerned with the "ontological reference" of the Cross, not with its "epistemological reference" as such. The Cross marks one place in the life of Jesus, the Incarnation, where God Himself discloses Himself in self-giving Love and Power. The only way the Cross in this sense can become operative in man is by what Paul called "crucifixion with Christ," a dying with Christ in self-denial and faith, which results, paradoxically, in the New Life, the New Being of God in man. We shall have much more to say about this "dying to life" in a subsequent section of this essay. It is sufficient to say at this point, by way of anticipation, that this "dying to life" in man is also the work of God just as it was the work of God that operated in the death and Resurrection of Jesus.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews the death of Jesus is portrayed in the



context of the Jewish sacrificial system. Jesus is pictured as the Great High Priest who offers his own blood "once for all" upon the altar as a sacrifice "to make expiation for the sins of the people" (2:17). He is superior to the high priests taken from among men who must offer sacrifices continually for themselves and for the people, for he is the Son who "bears the very stamp" of God's nature, upholding the universe by his word of power, and, who, "when he had made purification for sins . . . sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high . . ." (1:2, 3). He is the One who took upon himself man's nature "that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (2:14, 15). He is the Son who "learned obedience through what he suffered"; so that "being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (5:8-10). He is "the mediator of a new covenant," the New Covenant spoken of by Jeremiah the prophet, the provisions of which called for the law being put into the minds and written on the hearts of the people of the New Israel. Since under the first covenant death had come upon the people of Israel because of transgressions, so the death of Jesus "has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant." And, just as the first covenant was ratified by the blood of calves and goats, so the New Covenant is ratified by the blood of Jesus the Christ who "has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (9:15-26). Also, since Christ is the Great High Priest who serves in the heavenly sanctuary, the true tent, as opposed to the earthly tabernacle erected under the leadership of Moses, the faithful may "have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened . . . through the curtain, that is, through his flesh" (10:19, 20). Here, evidently the writer of Hebrews is thinking of the veil in the temple that was rent from top to bottom at the death of Jesus (Matthew 27:51).

The Epistle to the Hebrews is a strange composition, a mixture of Hebrew-Christian and Greek ideas. The blood of Christ is presented as a kind of (Greek) archetype of the sacrificial system of the ancient Israelites. In a sense it is also the "true" blood, the "eternal" blood, offered by the "eternal" High Priest in the "eternal" sanctuary in the



heavens. In other words, the Aaronic high priesthood, the Mosaic law, and the tabernacle were "particular" expressions of the "universal" priesthood and sacrifice of Christ himself. The fusion of Greek and Hebrew thought is markedly demonstrated in this New Testament book.

So skillfully does the writer fuse Greek and Hebrew ideas that one almost concludes that the author of this strange book has accomplished the impossible, that is, combined successfully the "priestly" and "legalistic" system of the Old Testament with the "prophetic" core of the Christian faith. But such is not the case. While "sacrificial" and "priestly" language prevail throughout the book, and while it seems that the writer sees *only* the blood of Christ as *the* work that alone redeems and saves the New Israel, in reality the center of attention is not "the blood" but *the Son* (not a servant like Moses, but superior to him and to any of the angels), *the Word of God* (living, active, sharper than any two-edged sword, before whom no creature is hidden but rather open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom they have to do), and *the Great High Priest* (who has passed through the heavens and who is now seated at the right hand of God making intercession for all who come in faith to God through him) (compare 2:17, 18; 8:1, 2; 10:12, 13; 12:2, and so on). In fact, it is made very explicit that the "mediator of the new covenant" is alive and will appear a second time from heaven, "not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (9:28). He is, as the eternal High Priest, "able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, *since he always lives to make intercession for them*" (italics added) (7:25).

From what has been written above, the reader may detect a similar ambivalence of expression in Hebrews to that found in the writings of Paul. Nowhere in the book does one find a clearly formulated explanation as to how the blood of Christ as such saves man from his sins and opens the way to God's forgiveness. In fact, in the midst of this sacrificial imagery of the "objective" work of Christ's blood, there appears a vein of thought, akin to Paul's "crucified with Christ" passages, where the "subjective" side of the death of Jesus is presented, for example, in the "new covenant passages" (8:10, 11; 10:16, 17) and especially in the passage which reads: "So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. There-



fore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him. . . . Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (13:12, 13, 15). But it must be admitted that the subjective side of the Cross is presented far less deliberately and cogently in the Epistle to the Hebrews than in the writings of Paul. In summary, it can be said without hesitation that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, while putting great stress on the blood of Christ for the benefit of his Hebrew-Greek readers, is much more concerned to set forward the Person, the Great High Priest who saves by serving in the heavenly tabernacle and who ever lives and will return to earth to complete his work of salvation.

Two well-known and often-quoted passages on the Cross are found in I Peter 1:18 and in 2:24, 25. But neither one of these passages tells us how the death of Christ reconciles or saves. The author uses the word "ransomed," but it is clear that the word means little more than "deliverance" to him. How the "precious blood of Christ" delivers or ransoms he does not say. He does provide, however, the clue to God's saving work in Christ in the over-all context of the Epistle, for there is much about the Resurrection in I Peter (compare 1:3-9, 21; 2:4-8; 3:18-22, and so on), which indicates that the author of this Epistle is thinking more about the Risen, Saving Christ than about the blood as such that saves from sin.

In I John a few scattered references to the blood of Jesus are found (1:7; 3:16; 5:6-8), but none of them contains anything of special significance concerning the meaning of the blood of Christ. John's stress, as that of the others we have examined, is on Jesus Christ, the Advocate, the Righteous One who "is the expiation . . . for the sins of the whole world" (2:2).

Many unanswered questions concerning the meaning and place of the Cross in the New Testament are no doubt in the mind of the reader at this point. The primary question, however, is probably the following: If the Cross as such does not reconcile and save, what does accomplish this for sinful man? Perhaps a partial answer to this question can be supplied in a later division of this treatise.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,  
The emblem of suffering and shame;  
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best  
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

In the old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,  
A wondrous beauty I see;  
For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,  
To pardon and sanctify me.

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
Till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
And exchange it some day for a crown.\*

The above hymn by George Bennard is a favorite among many Christians, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. But it reflects a one-sided emphasis on the Cross which is the result of centuries of pre-occupation with the "theology of the Cross." Few people are aware of the theological implications of such a hymn, and continue to sing it earnestly and tenderly time after time with little realization that the "theory of the Cross" it reflects does not at all adequately represent the New Testament message regarding the reconciling and saving works of God in Christ. It tells the story *in part* but it by no means tells *the whole* story of Atonement. This hymn is misleading because it implies that the Cross *alone* is sufficient for the pardoning and

\* "The Old Rugged Cross," words and music copyright 1913. Renewal 1941. The Rodeheaver Co., owner. All rights reserved. Used by permission.



sanctifying of sinners. In fact, the hymn all but treats the Cross as a *thing* which may be exchanged "some day for a crown." In a later section of this chapter a more detailed discussion of the theology of the Cross in Church hymns will be given.

In a very excellent little book, G. R. Beasley-Murray says: "For the largest section of Christendom, the fitting symbol of Christianity is a crucifix; the impression is given to the world that the Saviour is someone over whom we should weep. Even Protestants, in their constructions of the doctrine of the cross, have left Christ on it and presumed that His saving work finished with His death. The atonement is consequently explained in terms of a sacrifice on our behalf, a satisfaction of God's justice, a payment of our debt, a revelation of God's love, and that is all. It somehow seems to have been overlooked that the resurrection is an integral part of our Lord's work for us, so that salvation is essentially a deliverance from a living death in sin to a new life of righteousness in God."<sup>1</sup>

The above quotation states in essence the hermeneutical problem with which we will be dealing in this chapter. Why has it happened that for so many Christians, even to this day, "the fitting symbol of Christianity is a crucifix"? Why did our worthy predecessors *theorize* about the Cross but not see the Cross in relation to the Resurrection? Why for example did Anselm of Canterbury, in the eleventh century after Christ, write his classic *Cur Deus Homo?* and not also write a comparable essay on the Risen Christ? These are serious and far-reaching questions which demand honest answers, even though drastic changes may have to be made in the theology of tomorrow. G. R. Beasley-Murray says, "The effect on Christian thought of this neglect of the Resurrection of our Lord can scarcely be exaggerated. It has affected the *whole gamut of theology*" (*italics added*).<sup>2</sup> If it is true that the "whole gamut of theology" has been affected by the "neglect of the Resurrection," then full attention to the Resurrection will in turn call for radical changes in the "whole gamut of theology," and, we may add, in the whole gamut of Christian life and action.

Hugh T. Kerr, Jr., touches on the problem under discussion when he

<sup>1</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Christ Is Alive!* (London, Lutterworth Press, 1947), p. 12. Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

raises the question about Protestantism's growing observance of Lent and Holy Week. "As every working pastor knows," he says, "this is the busiest and in some ways the most hectic season of the Christian year. . . . Beyond this, however, there is a theological issue involved. Why all this sudden concentration on the passion and death of Christ? Is it a kind of liturgical exhibitionism of radical Protestantism's emphasis on the doctrine of the Atonement [Cross]? Is there something morbid about that three-hour Good Friday service [marathon]? Is the Cross of Christ, the Atonement, properly placed between the Incarnation and the Resurrection? If so much attention is paid to the Lenten season, how is it possible to give Easter and the Resurrection their climactic accent in one short day?"<sup>3</sup>

Professors Beasley-Murray and Kerr are among those known to this writer who are attempting to deal with the one-sided "theology of the Cross" which still continues to hold the dominant place in Christian thought and is even growing, as Professor Kerr states, among Protestants. Roman Catholicism has almost entirely eliminated the Resurrection from its theology, and it seems that Protestantism is following its lead. Something must be done to stop this trend; else further fragmentation of the Body of Christ will take place with even more rigid institutional lines drawn on the basis of varying interpretations of the Cross. Christian unity will not be found at the "foot of the Cross" but "before the Empty Tomb." Human interpretations of an event, the Cross, will further divide the Church, but the recognition of the Presence of the Living Lord in His Body through the Holy Spirit will bring the unity for which many Christians long today. "Institutionalism" and "dogmatism" are the two sledgehammers that have broken into fragments the foundation rock upon which a unified Christianity must stand, and the only corrective for institutionalism and dogmatism in the Church is the Power of the Holy Spirit who brings the Living Christ into Her midst. Defense of institution and dogma will then give way to the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit" for which the apostle Paul longed and prayed (II Corinthians 13:14).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Hugh T. Kerr, Jr., "Theological Table-Talk," *Theology Today*, XIV, 1 (April, 1957), pp. 107, 108. Used by permission.

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent treatment of this subject, see Dale Moody, "The Nature of the Church," *Review and Expositor*, LI, 2 (April, 1954), pp. 214ff.



### Theories of the Cross

Preoccupation with the Cross in Christian theology has led to many "theories of the Cross." That the Church has seen fit to theorize about the Cross per se is quite significant. Why isolate the Cross to theorize about it? It is surely worthy of careful study, but not in separation from the rest of Christ's work. But this is precisely what has happened during the long history of Christian theology. Amos N. Wilder sees this preoccupation with the Cross to be a betrayal of the New Testament, especially of the apostle Paul. "Average Christianity which so generally takes its stamp from Paul has obscured if not betrayed him. . . . One error has been to stereotype his teaching into a hard and fast dogmatic system, revolving especially around the theme of substitutionary atonement. Much of this is rightly grounded in Paul but wrongly formulated. In the absence of ample faith, the great images and concepts of Paul become shrunken and literal."<sup>5</sup> What framers of the "theology of the Cross" have apparently failed to see is the ambivalence in Paul's thinking concerning the Cross. They have failed to see that Paul's last word is not the Cross but Christ the Risen Lord. For Paul, God was not in the Cross alone reconciling the world to Himself, but in *Christ* reconciling the world to Himself.

At least four key concepts have furnished the theologians of the Cross with the fundamental ideas of interpretation. These are: ransom, satisfaction, substitution, and victory. Until the time of Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) the ransom idea was widely used as an explanation of the Atonement. The metaphor of ransom is used in the Scriptures, but hardly meaning more than the general idea of "deliverance." Early thinkers, however, seized upon this metaphor and attempted to understand the meaning of Jesus' death by determining who was the receiver of the ransom payment, what was the payment, and who the payer. They concluded that God was the payer, Christ the payment, and Satan the payee. Various interpretations were offered as to how this transaction was consummated. Irenaeus insisted that God "persuaded" Satan to accept the ransom, and refused to resort

<sup>5</sup> Amos N. Wilder, *New Testament Faith for Today* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1955), p. 109. See also William J. Wolf, *No Cross, No Crown* (Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), pp. 82-88, for a discussion of this same line of thought.



to violence or deceit against him. Others believed that God, being omniscient, was able to trick Satan into accepting the ransom by concealing the deity of the Son beneath the flesh of his manhood. Satan, like a hungry fish, took the bait of Jesus' flesh (put Jesus to death) and in turn was caught on the hook of his deity. Along with the "fishhook" metaphor the "mousetrap" metaphor was also used (Augustine). Satan, thus being caught, was defeated and the human race delivered from his clutches by the death of Jesus.

While the ransom, fishhook, and mousetrap metaphors can hardly be called theories in the true sense of the word, they are at least attempts to understand the death of Jesus in terms of a cosmic transaction involving three principal actors, God, Satan, and the Son. Beneath these metaphorical interpretations lie certain basic ideas that these early theologians were attempting to express: (1) the seriousness of human sin and the slavery it involves, (2) the concern of God the Father who is willing to put up His Son as a ransom to Satan, and (3) the victorious deliverance from sin and death (Satan) bought for the human race at such cost. But the unfortunate result was that these metaphorical interpretations were often taken quite literally, and this led to serious distortions throughout the whole gamut of Christian theology. In the first place, they led to unworthy ideas about God, that is, that God played a trick on or deceived Satan in the transaction. In other words, God's part in the bargain was not honestly consummated. In the second place, the death of Jesus was viewed as a kind of cosmic payment or transaction made primarily for Satan's benefit, rather than viewed, as the New Testament views it, as a gift or as a vicarious death for man's benefit. And the fatal weakness of these theories, as is true of practically all theories of the Cross as such, is their irrelevance to the needs of people as living persons.

These early theories were presented in grand and dramatic terms, more akin to a cosmic drama taking place in the heavens with man looking on as a spectator, rather than as a dramatic encounter taking place between man and God in an I-Thou relationship. In other words, this cosmic drama, with its *dramatis personae*, God, Satan, and the Son, was viewed in a highly abstract way, as an "objective" Atonement, enacted on a trans-historical plane, with little or no reference to man's needs as a living person. The ideas of deliverance and victory are surely expressed in dramatic and forceful fashion, but no hermeneutical key



was available to explain this victory so long as the interpreters limited their perspective to the Cross itself. The Resurrection was accepted as a fact by these early thinkers, but there is little indication that they regarded it as hermeneutically important, so far as the doctrine of the Atonement was concerned. The Resurrection would have provided the dynamic element they were lacking.

Anselm of Canterbury rebelled against these metaphorical attempts to explain the Cross, and gave to Christian theology the first deliberate, full-scale attempt to provide a rationale of the Cross. Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?* is one of the most important treatises on the meaning of the Atonement ever penned by men. In fact, its influence has been so great that the basic assumptions of the Christian view of the Atonement since Anselm's time have hardly moved beyond the main ideas in this book. Anselm developed his argument in *Cur Deus Homo?* somewhat as follows: By his disobedience man has offended the honor of God. In so doing he has incurred an infinite debt payable to God's honor. Since man must pay the debt, and since he cannot pay the debt, the God-Man must come into the world to render satisfaction to God's honor in man's behalf. Only in this way could God preserve His honor and man still avoid the penalty for sin which is death. In his death the God-Man rendered what was due God's honor so that God could release man from the debt which he could not pay. When man by faith accepts the satisfaction which the God-Man renders in his behalf, then he merits salvation and escapes from the wrath of God's unsatisfied honor. Because the God-Man was sinless and did not deserve to die, his death, therefore, was a work of supererogation providing unlimited merits applicable to man's account. Fallen man may now withdraw merits from this unlimited supply of merits in order to make up for his own demerits.

Anselm thus, in terms of a rational works-merit system, set the pattern for the full-scale development of the scholastic system which found classic expression in the theology of Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. From Anselm's day, then, salvation thus became a matter of keeping God satisfied or of warding off the wrath of God by drawing as needed from the merit-bank of heaven. As a result, an intricate system of works, penances, sacrifices, and so on, developed against which the revolt of the Reformation was directed. The sale of

indulgences, which disturbed Luther so deeply, was an outgrowth of this works-merit "plan" of salvation. It was not easily recognizable by the medieval mind that such a system of works-salvation was utterly inconsistent with the New Testament doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. Anselm's "satisfaction" theory of the Atonement (sometimes called the "commercial" theory), coupled with the institutionalism and dogmatism of the medieval Church, resulted in the oppressive authoritarianism against which free man would and did eventually revolt. We must conclude, therefore, that Anselm's contribution toward making the crucifix the central and fitting symbol of the Christian Church, both in the Catholic and in the Protestant branches, was far-reaching and complete.<sup>6</sup>

Whereas Anselm spoke of God's "honor" being offended by man's disobedience, later thinkers spoke of God's "justice" (the Reformers) or "government" (Hugo Grotius) as being violated by man's sin; whereas Anselm spoke of "satisfaction," later theologians spoke of "substitution"; but the point is that the basic idea in all is the same. A long line of prominent thinkers since Anselm's day have formulated theories of the Cross which, in principle, play on these themes in fugue-like fashion, for example, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Hugo Grotius, Jonathan Edwards, R. W. Dale, James Denny, and countless others. In fact, even when such capable thinkers as Jacob Arminius, John M. Campbell, R. C. Moberly, P. T. Forsyth, D. M. Baillie, John Baillie, Vincent Taylor, F. W. Dillistone, and Gustaf Aulén, and others, attempt to tone down and even eliminate such quasi-legalist and transactional ideas as "satisfaction," "substitution," and so on, they yet fail to overcome entirely the "substitutionary" idea in their endeavor to explain the death of Jesus as "representative" and/or "vicariously sacrificial," and so on. Some modern theologians, like Emil Brunner, for example, do attempt to consider the Resurrection along with the Cross in their explanations of the Atonement, but even then there is a noticeable drag in the direction of a "theology of the Cross." It will probably require many more years of patient exploration of the New Testament message before the influence of

<sup>6</sup> For excellent critical but brief treatments of Anselm's theory see W. T. Conner, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn., Broadman Press, 1954), pp. 127-136; and Wolf, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-108.



Anselm of Canterbury will have run its course. This, of course, is not to berate Anselm or to regard his influence as necessarily being "evil" in its intention.

Anselm, like any other thinker, was a child of his day, and his view of the Atonement clearly reflects this fact. The feudalistic system of the Middle Ages is noticeably reflected in his theory of the Atonement. God appears in the *Cur Deus Homo?* as a stern and unbending feudal lord whose "honor" at all costs must be defended. Full satisfaction must be paid to His "honor." As a result, such basic New Testament concepts as grace, love, mercy, and so on, could not find full expression in such a context of thought. Then, too, Anselm's theory stood in opposition to the New Testament emphasis on the oneness of God's working in Jesus the Christ. Anselm, like those before him, and like many after him, saw God and Christ as two different "persons," one dying in obedience and love to satisfy the other's honor, justice, or law. Paul's sweeping assertion that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" had been here turned into a coldly legal and transactional arrangement involving distinctions between God and Christ that the New Testament does not uphold.

Enough has been said, up to this point, to make it unnecessary to deal at length with the theory of the Atonement put forward by Thomas Aquinas, the theologian par excellence of the Roman Catholic Church. Aquinas adopted in the main the basic assumptions of Anselm's satisfaction theory. For that reason, to this day the Roman Catholic Church is preeminently the "church of the crucifixion," because its whole theology and ritual revolve around the sacrifice of the mass. The Roman Catholic Church is the historical channel through which flow the benefits of Christ's passion. Its continuity depends upon apostolic succession from the days of Christ and the first apostles. It is the Kingdom of God on earth and the sole dispenser of the "merits" of Christ's passion, along with the "merits" of Mary and of all other "saints." It is the end result of the Anselmic "commercial" theory of the Atonement, for in its theology and ritual the plan of salvation becomes an intricate system involving plus and minus, debt and payment, venial and mortal sins, confession and acts of penance, saying of and paying for masses for the dead in purgatory, and a multitude of other works-merit principles and activities too numerous to

mention in detail. It is a thoroughly legalistic and transactional system much more akin to the Old Testament legal and doctrinal system than to the New Testament message of reconciliation and salvation.

When the Protestant Reformation broke with full force against the legalism and authoritarianism of the Roman Catholic Church, the domination of the theology of the crucifixion should also have been broken. But such was not the case. In spite of the shift from law to grace in theology, the influence of Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas was so great that not even the Reformers could think of the Atonement without relating it primarily to the Cross. The death of Jesus for the Reformers was still thought of as a "satisfaction," or rather as a "penal substitution" demanded by God to protect His "justice"; and for that reason He inflicted "punishment" upon Christ, the "substitute" for sinful man. Since God's justice expressed in law had been violated by man's disobedience, it was necessary for one man to die for all the rest that the law might be satisfied. The law must be satisfied, it was argued; therefore sin must be punished. Since God was understood to be a stern and law-preserving Judge, no mercy for sinful man could be expected from Him, for this would amount to a relaxing and/or dishonoring of the law. Hence someone must pay the penalty for man's sin. This payment the God-Man made when he died on the Cross. Like the Anselmic theory, this theory of the Atonement was grounded upon the idea of a *quid pro quo* transaction involving the Son of God, who gives his life for the many (only for the elect in Calvin's thought), and God the Judge, who demands the full payment from the Son.

When all is said concerning the theology of the Cross propounded by the Reformers, it is evident that, in principle at least, there is no marked advance beyond the theology of the Cross developed by the scholastics of the Middle Ages. The Cross for the Reformers is still the one ground for the New Testament plan of salvation. Paul's revolutionary insight that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself was seen from the opposite point of view by the Reformers. It was God who needed to be reconciled to man, and it was Christ who died to bring about this reconciliation between God and man. Sometimes—and this is more true of Luther than of Calvin—this distinctly Pauline view was recognized and expressed by the Reformers, but in



the main their views on reconciliation and salvation were still very much within the context of thought we have thus far outlined.<sup>7</sup>

Countless books have been written on the Cross since the sixteenth century, but very few, if any, until very recently, have moved very far from the idea of the centrality of the Cross in the Atonement. Only a very few modern thinkers, relatively speaking, have dared to challenge the "cruciality of the Cross" and to seek to find a grounding for the doctrines of reconciliation and salvation in the Resurrection along with the Cross. It is rather amazing, when one pauses to think of it, that the New Testament's message to this very day should have been so drastically attenuated in this manner, especially since the New Testament writers found their life and breath and joy in the glory and power of the Risen Lord. And even these few pioneers mentioned above (for example, G. R. Beasley-Murray, Hugh T. Kerr, Emil Brunner, and others) have not yet found time to spell out, as needs to be done, a system of Christian theology rooted in the Total Event (Incarnation-Cross-Resurrection) of God's reconciling and saving working in the Christ-Holy-Spirit. This task is yet to be accomplished.

In 1930 Gustaf Aulén delivered the Olaus Petri Lectures at the University of Uppsala, out of which came a very provocative little book bearing the title *Christus Victor*. Dr. Aulén wrote these lectures because he was convinced "that the traditional account of the history of the idea of the Atonement" was in need of "thorough revision."<sup>8</sup> "The history of the doctrine of the Atonement," he says, "is a history of three types of view, which emerge in turn. The classic idea emerges with Christianity itself, and remains the dominant type of teaching for a thousand years. The origin of the Latin doctrine can be exactly determined; it belongs to the West, and it becomes the dominant form of the doctrine of the Atonement in the West in the Middle Ages. Though Luther returns to the classic type, and teaches it with unique power, post-Reformation theology goes back to the Latin type, which is therefore common to the scholasticism of both the Roman and the Protestant churches."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See again Conner, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-147, and Wolf, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-116, for good critical analyses of the "penal substitutionary" view.

<sup>8</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1951), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

The subjective view, which is the third type Aulén discusses, arose as a reaction against the Latin type. This view regards Christ as the Ideal Man who, through his love and obedience, influences men subjectively to love and serve God. It tends to minimize the gravity of sin and to magnify the possibility of the realization of human perfection by following the Perfect Example who is Christ. Abélard, the Socinians, Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Horace Bushnell, and others were all representatives of this "moral influence" or "example" type. This approach, in direct opposition to the classic view, Aulén says, is based upon the idea of continuity between God and man, and, unlike the classic view, sees the Atonement largely from the standpoint of man's nature and abilities. The classic view, on the other hand, begins with the idea of a radical discontinuity (dualism) between God and man and sees the Atonement as initiated and consummated by God Himself who reveals His victorious love in the Cross.

Though Aulén may not have intended to give his own personal view of the Atonement, the result is that he does just that. Much of the book contains an analysis and a defense of the classic view of the Atonement, which, he says, historically goes back to Irenaeus, "the earliest Father to give a thorough treatment of the subject."<sup>10</sup> Aulén argues at length to show that Irenaeus saw with the apostle Paul the necessary double-sidedness of the Atonement, in that God is both Reconciler and Reconciled. Irenaeus, he says, drawing freely from the New Testament, saw the Atonement as a dramatic conflict and victory on the part of the obedient and suffering Christ over the cosmic forces of evil holding mankind in captivity. *Christus Victor* is the theme of Irenaeus, although he also sees the death of Christ to be a ransom paid to the "apostasy" (the devil) for the release of man from bondage. Just how the death of Jesus could be viewed as a ransom paid to the devil and at the same time as a victory over the devil, Irenaeus (or Aulén) did not make clear. Yet the main lines of Irenaeus' view of the Atonement are made clear in Aulén's book.

The gravest weakness of the classic theory, in my opinion, is its failure to show how the "objective" work of God in Christ (ransom, victory, recapitulation, and so on) becomes "subjective," or, to use the apostle Paul's words, how the crucifixion of Christ becomes my crucifixion, my "death to sin," and my "resurrection to newness of life."

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.



Aulén points out, and rightly so, that Irenaeus saw God's work in Christ in terms of its entirety, that is, in terms of the Incarnation, Cross, Resurrection, and Exaltation of Christ. Yet, to me, it is not quite so obvious that Irenaeus thought much beyond the Cross when he dealt with the doctrines of reconciliation and salvation. In fact, in Aulén's analysis of Irenaeus' thought on the subject, he seems to show, inadvertently perhaps, that there were certain inconsistencies in Irenaeus' thought. For example, after pointing out that Irenaeus was "altogether free from the tendency, which has shown itself at times in later theology, to emphasise the death of Christ in such a way as to leave almost out of sight the rest of his earthly life,"<sup>11</sup> he yet asserts that to Irenaeus the death of Christ was the final and decisive battle and assuredly held a "central place"<sup>12</sup> in his thinking. At this point Aulén again hastens to add that Irenaeus did not view the death of Jesus "in isolation," but rather saw it in connection with the lifework of Christ as a whole, on the one hand, and in connection with the Resurrection and the Ascension, on the other hand.<sup>13</sup>

But, in spite of all these precautions, Aulén still seems unaware that his own quotations from Irenaeus and his analysis of these quotations do precisely what he says they do not do, that is, they assert the centrality of the Cross and view the Resurrection, for example, as a "manifestation" of the "decisive victory over the powers of evil, which was won on the cross. . . ." The Resurrection is viewed only as the "starting-point for the new dispensation, for the gift of the Spirit, for the continuation of the work of God in the souls of men. . . ."<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus (as well as Aulén) does not appear to think of the Resurrection as being the victory as such, but as a "manifestation" of the victory won on the Cross. It then appears, from the above analysis, that Irenaeus, like many after him, not only thought of the Cross as the *central event*, but also thought of the Cross as being the *point* at which the victory over the devil was won. This is asserted in strong language: "The passion of Christ brought us courage and power. The Lord through His passion ascended up on high, led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men, and gave power to them that believe in Him to tread upon serpents and

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

scorpions and upon all the power of the enemy—that is, the prince of the apostasy. The Lord through His passion destroyed death, brought error to an end, abolished corruption, banished ignorance, manifested life, declared truth, and bestowed incorruption.”<sup>15</sup>

It seems fair to ask, at this point, how the “passion” of Christ as such could do all that outlined in the above quotation apart from the Risen Lord. No victory over the apostasy could have been won in the death alone. The Resurrection then must be considered more than a “manifestation” of that victory and more than a “starting point” for a new dispensation, and so on. Here the Resurrection itself is viewed as an event as such that supplements the victory of the passion. But what constitutes the fatal defect here is that Irenaeus and Aulén distinguish too sharply between the work of Christ and Christ himself. What the New Testament really asserts is that salvation is the work of God in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, and not in any particular event in the life of Jesus the Christ.

In spite of the great merits of this book by Aulén, the verdict must be that here we have another “theory of the Atonement,” or more precisely another “theory of the Cross.” Nowhere in this little book does Aulén move appreciably beyond the Cross to the Resurrection. To be sure, a feeble attempt to do so is sometimes made, but inevitably the pull of tradition (Luther) is too much for him.

Two other very recent books must be briefly considered at this point: *Jesus Christ and His Cross* by F. W. Dillistone, 1953, and *No Cross, No Crown* by William J. Wolf, 1957. These books are selected because they illustrate the point made earlier in this essay that even current thinking on the Atonement, while offering some ray of hope that the domination of the theology of the Cross may at last be broken, still labors under the heavy weight of traditions formulated in the remote past and hallowed by the passage of time. Modern theologians, while often fighting valiantly against entrenched traditions in other areas of thought, nevertheless manifest blind spots when attempting to deal with the Atonement. It is the writer’s opinion that the two aforementioned books by such eminent and capable contemporary thinkers illustrate precisely this difficulty. Let us turn our attention first of all to Dillistone’s very excellent book.

Dr. Dillistone gives his book the significant subtitle, *Studies on the*

<sup>15</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, II, 20. 3, cited by Aulén.



*Saving Work of Christ*, and then proceeds to discuss the Cross of Jesus Christ in detail in eight chapters. Does he mean to imply that the saving work of Christ can be understood completely in terms of the Cross, or that the Cross is one aspect of the saving work of Christ? The whole weight of his argument seems to imply the former, although there are certain ideas in his argument that would seem to leave some room for the latter point of view. These conflicting (?) elements are more noticeable in the last chapter entitled "The Glory of the Cross," where, as the title indicates, the glorification of Jesus the Christ is understood primarily in relation to his death. Under the chapter heading are found the well-known lines:

In the cross of Christ I glory,  
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;  
All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round its head sublime.

My sinful self my only shame,  
My glory all, the cross.

Dr. Dillistone begins this chapter with a reference to the Greeks who came to see Jesus just before his death. The coming of the Greeks to Jesus, he writes, "constitutes for him the sign that his hour of destiny has come. The earthly task that the Father assigned to him is almost complete. The Son of Man is about to be 'glorified,' that is, he is about to be made the instrument of the final revelation of the glory of God. Through him the glory of God will be manifested to the Gentiles and all the ends of the earth will receive his salvation."<sup>16</sup> The Greeks could not understand such language because they were representative of the humanists, of those who think that man's problems, including his sin problem, can be handled in the final analysis by human reasoning and careful planning. But Jesus saw much deeper than this. He saw that life must come out of death, that suffering and sorrow must precede health and joy; therefore he must submit to the lowest indignities of men in order that the glory of the Lord might be revealed through his sacrifice. In deathless prose Dr. Dillistone drives home this point: "So out of the travail of his soul Jesus lifts up his eyes to God and accepts his destiny gladly, willingly. 'Father, glorify thy name.' In that

<sup>16</sup> F. W. Dillistone, *Jesus Christ and His Cross* (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 122. Copyright, 1953, by W. L. Jenkins. Used by permission.

moment the crisis of the ages was reached. The whole world stood under the judgment of the revelation of the glory of God. The prince of this world stood condemned as his false standards of self-assertion and lust for power and craving for material possessions were exposed to the burning light of the self-sacrifice of the vicegerent of God."<sup>17</sup>

In these and in other magnificent words Dr. Dillistone reveals his deep understanding of both the "objective" and "subjective" dimensions of the Cross, yet one could wish that he had gone on in this vein of thinking to embrace fully the dynamic of the Resurrection in his analysis of the saving work of God in Jesus Christ. This he *almost* does, but he falls short of it, I must conclude.

For example, he discusses the "glory of the Cross" under three main headings: "The Triumph over Evil," "The Forgiveness of Sins," and "The Living Sacrifice." "From the time of the earliest Christian witnesses down to our own day," he writes, "the Church has never lost the conviction that in some way the cross is *the place of the supreme and decisive triumph over all the forces of evil*."<sup>18</sup> Notice, first of all, his appeal to tradition ("the Church has never lost the conviction"), and second, his assertion that "in some way" the Cross marks the "place" of the triumph of Christ over all the forces of evil. This "in some way" appears also in connection with the relation of the Cross of Jesus to the "forgiveness of sins."<sup>19</sup> This vagueness of expression ("in some way") is usually characteristic of those who attempt, as Dillistone does here, to explain the victory of God in Christ over the demonic powers or the *divine forgiveness* in connection with the Cross in *particular*. This "in some way" reveals a basic weakness in any and all such attempts to understand God's forgiveness of sin and victory over evil in terms of the Cross without any, or very little, reference to the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ. We may fairly ask of Dillistone: How do the divine forgiveness and victory become man's apart from the glory of the Risen Lord? If the Cross was a "crisis" in the history of the world, what, we may ask, was the Resurrection? If we may speak of the Cross as the "climactic event"<sup>20</sup> in the travail of the ages, what must we say of the Resurrection—that it was *anticlimactic*? If we may speak of the

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123, 124.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.



divine forgiveness as the action of God "consummated at Calvary,"<sup>21</sup> what is left for us to say with regard to the divine forgiveness made personally and continuously available to sinful men through the Risen Lord who is the Spirit (II Corinthians 3:17, 18)? What is left for the Risen Christ to do, if *all* has been done on the Cross?

Again, let us repeat, it is quite evident that the "how" of the "work" of Jesus the Christ on the Cross is of secondary interest to Dr. Dillistone and, we repeat again, to all others who seek to ground the saving work of God solely in the Cross. After referring to Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* in which Christian's burden of sin is described as falling from his back at the Cross, Dillistone says that the "'how' of the experience is less important than the 'when' and the 'where.'" <sup>22</sup> Yet, he does admit that "we cannot altogether avoid the question as to how the sight of the Crucified can bring the assurance of forgiveness to sin-laden souls."<sup>23</sup> Following from this admission that the "how" cannot altogether be avoided, Dr. Dillistone gives us some of his deepest thinking and strongest argument in his excellent book. He wisely sees a dimension of the Cross that has been, and still is, so universally overlooked, that is, one that looks at the Cross as "the supreme miracle of man's moral life."<sup>24</sup>

At this point in his discussion Dr. Dillistone, in my opinion, should have called more fully upon the doctrine of the Resurrection to supply him with further explanation as to "how" the divine forgiveness and victory are made available to men. In this closing chapter he does make several references to the Resurrection, but, like many others, he does not regard it as an integral part of the reconciling and saving work of God in Christ. Even in his section entitled "The Living Sacrifice," where, of all places, he might have dealt at length with the Cross-Resurrection theme, he still is bound by the Cross as *the* principle of interpretation as far as God's saving work is concerned. This is made evident by his comments about Bishop Herbert Hensley Henson who summarized his personal religion in the statement "Jesus Christ and him crucified." "In whatever other respects men may differ," writes

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

Dillistone, "here is common standing ground: He died for me; I must live for Him."<sup>25</sup>

In this statement Dillistone probably reveals the heart of his thinking concerning the relationship between the Cross and the Resurrection. To him, apparently, the Resurrection serves primarily as a reminder of our obligation to live the kind of life in keeping with the love and obedience Jesus displayed in his death for men. In a sense, this is an "example" theory of the death (or Resurrection?) of Jesus. Since he died for me, I, to show my appreciation, must live for him, seems to be the main idea. Admittedly, the love and obedience of Jesus manifested in his life, sufferings, and death should be extolled and followed by the believer, but to see so little in the theological significance of the Resurrection is all but a betrayal of the teachings of the New Testament.

The above discussion is not intended in any sense as an attack upon Dr. Dillistone. It is altogether possible that I have missed some important insights in Dr. Dillistone's argument. It seems to me that, while Dr. Dillistone does see and state in fine prose the dynamic, psychological, and subjective dimensions of the Cross and thus avoids the static, legal, and transactional interpretations so foreign to the New Testament teaching, he nevertheless fails to do justice to the climactic and decisive victory note of the New Testament, that of the Resurrection of Christ and his Reign over all the earth in and through his Presence in the Power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, it seems to me that Dr. Dillistone has made the traditional mistake of seeing the work of Christ in separation from the Person of Christ and of understanding the doctrines of reconciliation and salvation in terms of the work of the Person rather than in terms of the Person who continually works.

The second book, Wolf's *No Cross, No Crown*, is in many respects a remarkable yet somewhat puzzling book. This book, to my knowledge, is one of the few books recently published that attempt to deal with the Atonement from the broader perspective of the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus the Christ. The basic theme of the book is expressed at least in part in the following quotations: "Cross and Crown together symbolize the wholeness of Christian salvation.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.



This wholeness in the biblical view remains a challenge for our contemporary religious movements. . . . More and more it is seen that the answer to modern man's question about security is the salvation described in the Bible as God's work in the Cross and the Crown of Christ the Redeemer." And again: "Incarnation and atonement are not set against each other, but are embraced in a comprehensive unity. The crown of thorns placed upon Jesus' head by the soldiers is a mocking tribute to the togetherness of death and resurrection. 'No Cross, No Crown' is not a statement of temporal succession, although that is true as far as it goes, but of the inner plot of the drama of our salvation."<sup>26</sup>

But in my opinion Professor Wolf falls slightly short of his intended goal. A glance at the Index (page 213) reveals that the word "Cross" is used repeatedly throughout the book, but the word "Crown" is, surprisingly enough, used very sparingly. True, the number of times an author uses a given word is not necessarily significant, but in this case there seems to be significance. This conclusion is asserted because Professor Wolf does not hesitate to speak of the drama of Incarnation and Atonement as having reached "its climactic point in the historic Cross." "Here," he continues, "the teaching [of the Son] is confirmed by the life, a life willing to surrender its claims upon existence in utter obedience to God. It is a life that has become a death. Here the sinfulness of men becomes utterly concrete. . . . But the revelation of sin is only part of the meaning of the Cross. There is the more overwhelming demonstration and realization of God's love for man. Christ asks forgiveness for his enemies. In so doing he replaces the uncertainty of rabbinic teaching on repentance and forgiveness by a divine act writ large upon the page of history. Hereafter the Church will confess her belief in the forgiveness of sins, not as the result of rabbinic argumentation, but as guaranteed by the Cross."<sup>27</sup>

We may fairly ask Professor Wolf what he means by the "climactic point" reached in the "historic Cross." If the historic Cross was the climactic event, what was the historic Resurrection—"anticlimactic"? Precisely what meaning would the Cross have as the demonstration of God's love and the guarantee of forgiveness of sins apart from the

<sup>26</sup> Wolf, William J., *No Cross, No Crown* (New York, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1957), pp. 17, 74, 75. Copyright 1957 by William J. Wolf. Reprinted by permission.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Resurrection? How can we speak of the Cross as revealing man's sin and God's love and forgiveness and not also speak of the Resurrection in the same terms? Professor Wolf does speak of the historic Resurrection, but it seems to me that he fails to go *all the way* toward relating it to the Incarnation and to the Cross. This is said, with some fear and trembling on my part, in the light of a very strong statement which Professor Wolf makes in his book, as follows: "The New Testament association of the death of the believer to sin with Christ's death and burial, and of his rising to newness of life with the resurrection of Christ, needs to be brought out more than it has."<sup>28</sup> This he says in connection with the meaning of the sacrament of baptism within the context of the Church as the atoning fellowship.

With this assertion we heartily agree, yet we have doubts as to whether the New Testament doctrine of the Resurrection can be adequately understood in terms of the historic Church (atoning fellowship), the sacraments, the hope of the Second Coming, and the doctrine of the Trinity, as Professor Wolf seems to think. Admittedly, all of these elements are parts of the idea of the Resurrection in the New Testament, but the New Testament leaves no doubt in our minds that the Resurrection stands for the Risen Christ, the Living Christ, ruling in and through the Church over all the earth and acting in history in the Power and in Presence of the Holy Spirit.

This is precisely the note that *does not sound in full volume* in Professor Wolf's book. Perhaps this lack is due in part to his connection with a highly liturgical and hierarchical Church. It seems to me that he has tended to interpret the Resurrection too much in terms of the victory (Crown?) and love of Christ as being perpetuated in history through *human efforts* in the historic Church and not enough in terms of the continuous activity of the Living Christ in the Holy Spirit within the fellowship of believers. In fact it has been difficult for me to determine precisely what he means by "Crown" in his argument. He means, I think, that the Crown arises out of the Cross for every believer, just as the Crown for Jesus resulted from the Cross. This is a very valuable insight, and a true one, but it seems to me that a more adequate understanding of *how* this is accomplished in the believer and in the Church would result by making the historic Incarnation-Cross-Resurrection *central* and the Resurrection *climactic* as the New

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.



Testament does. Professor Wolf argues that the Incarnation and Atonement (Cross and Crown) comprise a whole or a unity, but he seems to fall back upon the Cross as central and climactic.

I hope that I am not being unduly critical of Professor Wolf's book. I do not know of a single book I have read on the Atonement in recent years that has helped me as much as this one. It may be that I am expecting too much of Professor Wolf in the light of what he intended to do in this book. I can only hope that he will continue thinking along this line toward a more dynamic interpretation of the Christian faith for our day.

Before turning to another aspect of the "theology of the Cross," a word needs to be said concerning the changing nature of the historic theories of the Cross. Professor Wolf rightly says that there "can never be a final theology of salvation. All such claims become shipwrecked upon the reefs of the temporal and cultural environment of the age and of the personal limitations of the individual."<sup>29</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick has asserted this line of thought many times in his writings, for example: "Basic in my thinking has been the conviction that theologies are psychologically and sociologically conditioned and that dogmatism in theology, whether 'liberal' or 'orthodox,' is ridiculous."<sup>30</sup> In comparing other disciplines with that of theology he says that "the fact that astronomies change while stars abide is a true analogy of every realm of human life and thought, religion not least of all."<sup>31</sup>

The historic theories of the Cross have certainly revealed these characteristics. Even the New Testament theology of the Cross was not free from this relativity of the interpreter to his psychological and sociological environment. If all this is true, should we not throw up our hands in despair and give up the attempt to understand the New Testament's teachings on reconciliation and salvation? This might seem to be the case, if we continue to search for the answers we are seeking in some revelation of the past or in some one event that will tell us once for all what reconciliation and salvation are and mean. However, happily, the New Testament points us beyond *itself* and its

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Living of These Days* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1956), p. 231.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

time to the Eternal Now where past, present, and future are joined in the gracious working and speaking of God in the Total Event of Christ and Holy Spirit. God is working and speaking *here and now* in the Living Christ-Holy Spirit. In this Speaking we find our abiding stars, our eternal truths. We have not been left with the hopeless task of discovering and/or formulating a theology (or astronomy, and so on) that will never change, and the moment we do attempt to fix a theology of this or that position we will eventually find ourselves bound by the traditions of a bygone day and unable to hear the Word of God that ever proceeds from His mouth (Matthew 4:4).

### **The Cross in Christian Worship**

Mention has already been made of the growing emphasis in Protestant churches on the Lenten services.<sup>32</sup> At this point it would be useless to attempt to point out how much the symbol of the Cross has been used in all forms of Christian worship. For centuries the crucifix has been the "fitting symbol" of Christianity. Countless paintings have appeared in the course of Christian history depicting Christ on the Cross, and every altar has been adorned with some sort of crucifix in wood, in stone, or in a precious metal placed upon it. Truly the Cross has been the "heart" and "soul" of Christian worship to this very hour. Myriads of sermons have been and are being preached from the pulpits of the Christian churches and in the tents and out-of-doors meeting places of the revivalists urging nonbelievers to come to the foot of the Cross and be saved. Church songbooks are filled with somber and melancholy hymns, some hauntingly beautiful, such as, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," and others crude and even repulsive, such as, "Are You Washed in the Blood?" sung to a lilting tune upsettingly incongruent with the hymn itself. At this point in our discussion we want to deal in a little more detail with the theology of the Cross being proclaimed in the hymns being used by Christians today. A little later we shall cautiously suggest what must be done toward replacing many hymns which very inadequately proclaim the story of God's reconciling and saving works in Christ.

Hymns of course must be simple, if they are to be sung with understanding by the masses of Christians. For this reason hymns tend to

<sup>32</sup> See above, p. 41.



preserve the traditional and naïve expressions of Christian theology. Since hymns in most cases are poems set to music, traditional similes and metaphors have become common stock among the hymn writers. For example, almost every hymn known to me uses the familiar ransom metaphor when the story of the Cross is sung. Yet, the ransom idea is barely mentioned in the New Testament with reference to the Atonement. It certainly is not the *main* theme of the New Testament regarding the Atonement. To illustrate, let us consider only a few hymns known to most Protestant Christians and to some Roman Catholic Christians as well. We began this chapter with one of the best-known and most often used hymns, "The Old Rugged Cross"; therefore, we shall not discuss it again at this point.

A hymn well known to most Protestants is "My Jesus, I Love Thee" (William R. Featherstone):

My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine,  
 For Thee all the follies of sin I resign;  
 My gracious Redeemer, my Saviour art Thou;  
 If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

I love Thee because Thou hast first loved me,  
 And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree;  
 I love Thee for wearing the thorns on Thy brow;  
 If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

As asserted above concerning many hymns, the Cross in this hymn is understood as that which purchases the pardon of the believer. The hymn is a tender and beautiful one, but it knows only the Cross in the salvation story.

Another often used hymn by E. A. Hoffman reads thus:

Down at the cross where my Saviour died,  
 Down where for cleansing from sin I cried,  
 There to my heart was the blood applied;  
 Glory to His name.

I am so wondrously saved from sin,  
 Jesus so sweetly abides within,  
 There at the cross where He took me in;  
 Glory to His name.

Oh, precious fountain that saves from sin,  
 I am so glad I have entered in;

There Jesus saves me and keeps me clean;  
Glory to His name.

Come to this fountain so rich and sweet;  
Cast thy poor soul at the Saviour's feet;  
Plunge in today and be made complete;  
Glory to His name.

This hymn unmistakably asserts that salvation is to be found in the "precious fountain" where one's soul can be "made complete." Here the Cross is seen as the only ground of man's salvation. The writer of this hymn was totally oblivious of any other event or aspect in the New Testament message concerning the story of salvation. Another hymn, similar to the above, but not used so often nowadays, though still used sometimes, is "There Is a Fountain" by William Cowper:

There is a fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;  
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,  
Lose all their guilty stains.

We could go on, filling up page after page with hymns that deal with the Cross in almost total separation from the rest of God's working in Christ; but the point has been made clear, it seems to me. Perhaps simply to cite the titles of hymns of this type still widely used will add a little more weight of evidence to the argument. Consider, for example, "Jesus Paid It All" (H. M. Hall), "Not All the Blood of Beasts" (Isaac Watts), "Calvary" (W. M'K. Darwood), "Oh, My Saviour Crucified" (John Batty), "My Redeemer" and "Once for All" (P. P. Bliss), "He Died for Me" (John Newton), "Just as I am" (Charlotte Elliott), "Near the Cross" (Fanny J. Crosby), "I Will Sing the Wondrous Story" (F. H. Rowley), "He Died of a Broken Heart" (T. Dennis), "The Cross Is Not Greater" (B. Booth), "I Am Coming to the Cross" (W. H. McDonald), "Down to the Sacred Wave" (S. F. Smith), "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" (Ray Palmer), "I Gave My Life for Thee" (Frances R. Havergal), "Beneath the Cross of Jesus" (Elizabeth C. Clephane), "At the Cross" (Isaac Watts), "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing" (Charles Wesley), "Jesus I My Cross Have Taken" (Henry F. Lyte), "O Could I Speak" (Samuel Medley), "I'll Live for Him" (R. E. Hudson), "Fling Out the Banner! Let It



Float" (George W. Doane), "Redeemed" (Fanny J. Crosby), and "Nothing But the Blood" (Robert Lowry). This partial list includes only a small number of the hymns used by many Christians which show the domination of the theology of the Cross in Christian worship. Out of a hymnal containing more than five hundred hymns, benedictions, and responses for all occasions, and classified under fifty-nine different headings (excluding the heading "Cross"), there were seventy-six hymns that definitely isolated the Cross as being the only ground (usually interpreted as ransom) of man's salvation. Very few, no more than four or five, hinted at any reconciling or saving significance in the Resurrection.

Some hymns treat the Cross and Resurrection in "dispensationalist" fashion. For example, the hymn "I Saw the Cross of Jesus" by F. Whitfield contains in Stanza Three a passing reference to "Christ the risen Lamb," but this reference to the Resurrection pertains only to the life the *believer* will enjoy *after physical death*. Otherwise, the Cross dominates the theme of the hymn throughout. Another hymn of a similar nature is "Man of Sorrows" by P. P. Bliss. This hymn of five stanzas devotes four of them to the Cross where "full atonement" was made. The last half of the fourth stanza and that of the fifth stanza do state that the "Man of Sorrows" is "now in heaven exalted high" and will eventually return to earth as a glorious King, "all His ransomed home to bring." In other words, this faint reference to the Risen Lord has meaning only in terms of his Second Coming when he shall come to take the ransomed back to heaven with him. The Cross seems to relate to salvation in this life while the Resurrection seems to be related to the future salvation in heaven. The New Testament emphasis on the present Reign and Work of the Living Christ in the Church through the Holy Spirit is totally ignored in this "dispensationalist" hymn.

The hymn "He Just Put Himself in My Place" (author unknown) fits also in the above classification. The third stanza reads thus:

Soon He's coming again from glory,—  
The prophets of God on this agree;  
And till then this to others I'm telling,  
That for them He died as for me.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Used by permission of Alfred B. Smith, Montrose, Pennsylvania.

The "dispensationalist" nature of this stanza is clearly in evidence. The first two stanzas sing only of the Cross where he carried man's guilt "to the tree." The last stanza, shown above, sings of his coming from glory in the "near future" (soon), but "till then" the story to be told to others is that he died for them. The Risen Christ is now in heaven waiting to return to earth, and, while he delays, the believer must continue to tell others about his death for them. There is here no hint or implication that the Risen Christ is *also at work in history* in the Holy Spirit. Such an interpretation posits an unfortunate disjunction between Cross and Resurrection that does violence to the New Testament message as well as involves a problem with reference to the Trinity. The Risen Christ in this interpretation appears to be *another Person* who must wait in heaven until it is time for him to return to the earth.

Other types of cross-centered hymns strike the note of the Resurrection in a way different from the dispensationalist approach. One such hymn is "Living for Jesus" by T. O. Chisholm. It calls for a living for Jesus as an act of gratitude for what Jesus suffered on the Cross.

Living for Jesus who died in my place,  
Bearing on Calv'ry my sin and disgrace,  
Such love constrains me to answer His call,  
Follow His leading and give Him my all.

This line of interpretation calls for a kind of *quid pro quo* arrangement between the Jesus who suffered and the believer who feels obligated to be loyal to Jesus and live "for Jesus thro' earth's little while." Needless to say, this sort of interpretation of the relationship between the Cross and the Resurrection falls far short of the New Testament teaching.

Some hymns begin by emphasizing the Risen Christ yet eventually fall back into the theology of the Cross. Two hymns will illustrate this curious trend of thought: "Christ Receiveth Sinful Men" (arranged from Neumaster) and "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today" (fourteenth century Latin hymn with fourth stanza by Charles Wesley). The former seemingly stresses in the first two stanzas that Jesus the Christ receives sinful men and gives rest to those who trust his word.



But stanzas three and four apparently fall back into the traditional "satisfaction" theory of the Cross. Having begun with the work of the Person of (the Risen?) Christ who receives and saves sinful men, the hymn then transfers attention to *that* work of Christ (the Cross?) which *satisfied* (note past tense) the last demand of the law, making it possible for the believer to stand "pure before the law" without condemnation of heart and purified from every spot and stain, so as to be able to enter heaven with Christ. In this hymn there is a mixing of the dynamic and personal with the forensic approach to the doctrine of the Atonement. The latter hymn is a hymn of the Resurrection, yet the Atonement is understood entirely in terms of the "pains which He endured" in order to redeem sinners and procure salvation for them. Like some of the hymns studied above, this hymn sings about the heavenly King but fails to say anything about the saving work of the King in the affairs of men on earth.

The well-loved hymn by Charles Wesley, "O for a Thousand Tongues," falls into a slightly different classification. The first two stanzas sing about God Himself.

O for a thousand tongues to sing  
My great Redeemer's praise,  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of His grace.

My gracious Master and my God,  
Assist me to proclaim,  
To spread to all the earth abroad  
The honors of Thy name.

The last two stanzas extol the name of Jesus who atones for sinners with his blood.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,  
That bids our sorrows cease;  
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,  
'Tis life, and health, and peace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,  
He sets the prisoner free;  
His blood can make the foulest clean;  
His blood availed for me.

This hymn makes absolutely no reference to the Risen Lord or to the saving Power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of men. In fact, it moves abruptly from God above to Jesus on earth who dies on the Cross to break the power of canceled sin and set the prisoner free. The distinction between God and Jesus is too radical. On the other hand it is Jesus who atones by his death on the Cross. No other events in his life or aspects of his Person are meaningful so far as the Atonement is concerned. The last line of the hymn, "His blood availed for me," reflects the penal substitutionary theory of the Atonement, or at least the satisfaction theory.

Lest the reader conclude from the above discussion concerning the theology of the Cross in Christian hymns that I consider all hymns to be theologically unsound, I hasten to say that there are hymns that do sing the whole Gospel, that is, that do express more adequately the New Testament teachings on the Atonement, but it is not to my purpose to deal with these hymns in this book. However, it is my opinion that many of the hymns now used by Christians in worship are inadequate and misleading in theology, and therefore need to be revised or else excluded from Church hymnals. It will take much time and effort by theologians and/or hymn writers to alter appreciably the theological climate of our day and to bring the message and worship of the Church more nearly into line with the larger New Testament message. A theology of the Cross will always be needed, but not one that will dominate and even distort other basic New Testament themes, as it has done in the past.

If some of the hymns used in worship need to be revised or excluded from Church hymnals, what type of hymn should take their place? The answer would run something like this: Christian hymns should, as far as possible, sing the whole Gospel, or, if not the whole Gospel, *at least one aspect or aspects of the Gospel without distorting the Christian message as a whole.* With this in mind, I am suggesting, with much reluctance and uneasiness, that the following hymns serve as examples. I am painfully aware of my limitations as a hymn writer, but perhaps these examples will serve some purpose toward illustrating the kinds of hymns I think are needed in Christian worship services. The reader is urged to concentrate less on the quality of the poems here offered and more upon the intention of the author in writing them.



The first is entitled "My Soul is Very Sorrowful" (compare Matthew 26:38, 39; John 16:20):

"My soul is very sorrowful!"  
 Out flowed the words in Gethsemane,  
 Words of the Saviour filled with woe,  
 Suff'ring there for you and me.

"Father, if it be possible,"  
 So prayed the Saviour on His face;  
 "Let this cup pass, if Thou wilt,  
 If not, with me share Thy Grace."

Sorrow and love are mingled here,  
 In the shadow of the Cross,  
 Bringing God's great Mercy near,  
 Given for our pain and loss.

Gaze on the Saviour on the Tree;  
 Take up your cross, your sin to confess,  
 Crucified with Christ to be  
 Dead to self within your breast.

"Sorrow for you will turn to joy,"  
 Thus spoke the Christ who rose from the dead;  
 Be ris'n with Him, new life employ,  
 With His Crown upon your head.

Live with Christ, the Christ within;  
 Lovingly serve Him while it is day,  
 Moved by His Spirit, Grace to win  
 Victory throughout the way.

The second hymn bears the title "By Every Word" and is based upon one of the teachings of Jesus during the "temptations" (compare Matthew 4:4):

By every Word that proceeds  
 From the mouth of God, there comes  
 To hopeless mortals, distraught, undone,  
 A message of forgiveness, barring none  
 From the healing Word, the saving Deeds.

By every Word that proceeds  
 From the mouth of God, there goes

To helpless mankind, wayward, laid low,  
A living stream of mercy, wherein flows  
The all-cleansing Word, pure for man's needs.

By every Word that proceeds  
From the mouth of God, the Life,  
Manifested in the Living Christ,  
Close lies to man's reach in the Spirit's might,  
Transforming, when Faith intercedes.

Another hymn for consideration is "A Living Hope Is Mine" drawn from a New Testament Epistle (compare I Peter 1:3):

A living hope is mine, even though  
By failure hampered am I, by strife torn,  
With sorrows laden, so heavily borne,  
For God His Grace freely bestows.

A living hope is mine, even though  
In darkness hidden am I, reason gone,  
Groping for meaning, the hours dragging long,  
For God speaks His Word here below.

A living hope is mine, even though  
By despair o'ercome am I, faith shaken,  
Faced by death's onslaught, no hope to waken,  
For Life in God through Christ outflows.

A living hope is mine I now know,  
Piercing beyond space-time's enclosing wall,  
For alive is the Christ! never to fall!  
His Spirit my Guide the Way through!

The last hymn presented here was inspired by a striking passage in I Timothy 6:16—"Who Alone Has Immortality?":

Who alone has Immortality  
And dwells in unapproachable Light?  
'Tis God the King whose dread Sovereignty  
Is seen within nature's awesome might,  
Yet lies beyond contemplation's sight.

Who alone has Immortality  
And dwells in unapproachable Light?  
'Tis Mighty God who eternally



Determines the daylight and the night,  
And moon and stars fast holds in their flight.

Who alone has Immortality  
And dwells in unapproachable Light?  
'Tis God the Saviour in Mercy  
Transcending the Law's unbending Right  
That men may live, without fear to die.

Who alone has Immortality  
And dwells in unapproachable Light?  
'Tis God the Father who openly  
Revealed in The Man in Whom was Life  
That men may hope in the midst of strife.

Who alone has Immortality  
And dwells in unapproachable Light?  
'Tis God in Grace, in Love's victory  
At Calv'ry did Death and Life unite,  
Thus burdened for mankind's dreadful plight.

God alone has Immortality  
And dwells in unapproachable Light.  
'Tis He whose Light from Eternity  
Breaks forth full orb'd in the Risen Christ  
On men of faith, walking not by sight.

In the above hymns, I have tried to keep in mind the Total Event of God's reconciling and saving work in Christ. I can only hope that men more qualified than I to write hymns will give themselves to this task.

### Retrospect and Prospect

We have reached a turning point in this discussion. Until now the approach has been largely negative. From this point on the argument will be more positive and constructive in nature. In Chapters II, III, and IV it was argued that Christian theology from earliest times has been under the domination of two partial approaches to the Christian faith: (1) undue preoccupation with the historical Jesus and (2) with the event of the Cross *in itself*. It must be observed that these are two fundamental elements of the Total Event, yet each dealt with alone leads to a short-circuiting of the Christian message. Incidentally, it

needs to be pointed out how interrelated these two approaches are. It is especially noticeable in the hymns examined above how the theology of the Cross and the theology of the Incarnation are bound together. When salvation is understood to be grounded solely in the "blood of the Lamb," it is but a short step from that to a concept of salvation rooted in the man Jesus, or in a theology of the "past." It appears that the necessary corrective for this incomplete "theology of Jesus on the Cross" is the doctrine of the Resurrection and all that it implies. This shall be the task from this point on—to spell out the implications of this tremendous doctrine in the light of Paul's astounding assertion: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (I Corinthians 15:17).

In spelling out the climactic "event" of the Resurrection, we shall of course be led to a consideration of the doctrine of the Church, of the Word of God, and of the Holy Spirit. What part do these doctrines play in our understanding of the Total Event of God's working in Christ? Then, too, how have these doctrines in turn been affected by the dominant traditional "theology of Jesus on the Cross" and what will be the result if and when this traditional theology is overcome and modified in the direction of the doctrine of the Resurrection, with all that the doctrine entails? These are serious questions and will be dealt with as thoroughly as possible within the limits of the purpose of this study.



## CHAPTER V

# SAVED BY HIS LIFE: THE RISEN CHRIST

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, *now that we are reconciled*, shall we be saved by his life [italics added].<sup>1</sup>

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.<sup>2</sup>

And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.<sup>3</sup>

### Neglect of the Doctrine of the Resurrection

Much has already been said previously with reference to the neglect of the doctrine of the Resurrection in Christian theology, especially with regard to the doctrines of reconciliation and salvation. For the most part the spotlight has steadily shone upon the Cross with an occasional beam sent in the direction of the Incarnation. What is needed is not a spotlight to be played upon the one or the other of the events in the life of Jesus the Christ, but rather a floodlight to shine with full and sweeping radiance upon the Total Event, including the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection. A spotlight is a useful instrument when one wishes to examine *the part* in its minute details, but the floodlight is needed when one wishes to see the parts in relation to the whole. Both spotlight and floodlight are needed if one would pursue the truth, and both must be used with skill and caution.

<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:10.

<sup>2</sup> I Corinthians 15:17.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 4:33.

In his book on the Resurrection, Professor G. R. Beasley-Murray describes a visit which the late Dr. W. Y. Fullerton paid to the mimic Calvary in the village of Domodossola in Italian Switzerland. "A series of chapels had been erected," he writes, "with pictures or effigies depicting the scenes of our Lord's Passion. The first showed Christ before Herod; the second, Christ grasping the cross; the third, Christ shouldering its weight; the fourth, Christ carrying it along, and so on. The climax of the scenes was in the church itself where there was a great picture of the cross, raised, with Christ upon it, and in the skies astonished angels gazed down at the tragedy of human sin and divine love. Up to this point the path was well worn by the feet of the devout pilgrims. For years they had come to witness anew the sufferings of their Saviour, and doubtless had mourned and wept at the sight of His agonies. But there they stopped. Their Christ was dead. 'Beyond the church there was another shrine,' wrote Fullerton; 'but the singular thing was that the path, well worn up to this point, now became grass-covered. Evidently nobody went any further. Though it was a wet day, and the grass was long, I went to the summit, and there, behold! was found the Chapel of the Resurrection! The builders of the Calvary (let that, at least, be said to their credit) did not stay with the dead Christ, but the people, the worshippers, never got any further. . . . The grass-grown path, untrodden by human feet, was a witness that could not be disputed.'"<sup>4</sup>

Professor Beasley-Murray then goes on to say that a "more perfect reflection of the mind of the Church of the ages would be difficult to find. That which had been the central affirmation of the first disciples is now of no importance to the average Christian. It is not talked about, it is not preached on, it is not even wondered at; it is simply ignored."<sup>5</sup>

"If we were to judge by modern [and ancient] Christian art, hymns, and devotional usage," writes Professor Filson, "this [the Cross as central] would seem the certain answer. Indeed, the elaborate presentation of the Passion Story in the Gospels, and the frequency with which the rest of the New Testament mentions the Cross and its meaning, appear to clinch this conclusion. Yet the conclusion is completely false. None of the New Testament books, none of the New

<sup>4</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Christ Is Alive!*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.



Testament sermons, none of the New Testament thinking was centered in the Cross."<sup>6</sup>

The Resurrection has not to this day received its due treatment theologically, perhaps in part as a result of the long wrangle over the historical probability of its occurrence. But apart from the question of the historical fact of the Resurrection, there is the important point of its theological significance. The New Testament evidence should be sufficient for anyone wishing to probe more deeply into the meaning of the Resurrection for the Christian faith. "To preach the fact of the Resurrection was the first function of the Evangelist," says Bishop Westcott; "to embody the doctrine of the Resurrection is the great office of the Church; to learn the meaning of the Resurrection is the task not of one age only, but of all."<sup>7</sup>

The late Professor Walter T. Conner, in a study of the Cross in the New Testament, sees, however, beyond the Cross to the Resurrection. "We find in orthodox Protestant thought the conception that it was the death of Jesus that brought salvation," he writes. "The resurrection in some types of theology was a kind of appendix, added for the sake of indicating that God accepted the offering made by Christ for man's sin. In such a legalistic type of thought, the resurrection of Jesus is a kind of postscript, almost an afterthought. This by no means represents the vital message of the New Testament. In New Testament thought, the resurrection of Jesus is not an addendum attached to his death as a kind of official certification of the value of his death in paying our debt or in acquiring merit on our behalf. *It is of the very essence of his saving work*" [italics added].<sup>8</sup> In the same vein of thought Professor Filson argues that the "entire New Testament was written from the post-resurrection viewpoint. Even when the writers do not mention the Resurrection, they speak from the life outlook of a church that lives in the glow of the resurrection faith."<sup>9</sup>

How, then, does one account for the neglect of the doctrine of the Resurrection in view of the place of prominence it holds in the New Testament record? Without my attempting to be exhaustive, it is

<sup>6</sup> Floyd V. Filson, *Jesus Christ the Risen Lord* (Nashville, Tenn., Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 28. Used by permission.

<sup>7</sup> Cited by Beasley-Murray, *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 25.

<sup>8</sup> W. T. Conner, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn., Broadman Press, 1954), p. 166. Used by permission.

<sup>9</sup> Filson, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

my opinion that there are several important reasons why the doctrine has been ignored or minimized. The first we have already discussed at length—that the Passion came to hold the center of attention. But why did the Passion come to hold such prominence? Perhaps the answer lies for the most part in the Hebrew background of those who were called upon to interpret the events associated with Jesus the Christ. It is well known that the Old Testament sacrificial system put great stress upon bloody sacrifices. It was only natural that the early Jewish Christians should understand the death of Jesus to be a kind of bloody sacrifice which would procure for believers the divine forgiveness. Since Christianity in its early formative years emerged within the context of the nationalistic and priestly religion of the Jews, its greatest struggle was against such elements, and its greatest victory was its ultimate throwing off of these “yokes of bondage” (compare Galatians 5:1) to win its fight for an unhindered Gospel (compare Acts 28:31).<sup>10</sup>

But even though the New Testament abounds in concepts drawn from the politico-religious system of Judaism, there are inherent in the New Testament message some fundamental ideas that should never permit the interpreter to understand the message in legalistic and mechanical terms. Even though Paul used terms drawn from the legalistic system of Judaism, such as the terms “justification,” “adoption,” “reconciliation,” “law,” “sacrifice,” and so on, it should be clear to the student who attempts to understand the full sweep of Paul’s theology that these terms do not call for legalistic interpretation. They are to be understood from the standpoint of the fundamental assertion of the Gospel that man and God must come together in an I-Thou encounter, in a dynamic personal relationship, which renders null and void all such legalistic requirements which insist on something for man to do or for man’s “substitute” to do before he can merit the saving grace of God.

Personalism versus legalism thus describes the essential poles of opposition around which the Biblical message is unfolded. In the end

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent treatment of this line of thought, see Frank Stagg, *The Book of Acts* (Nashville, Tenn., Broadman Press, 1955). Professor Stagg here argues very convincingly that the purpose of the author of the book of Acts (Luke) was to portray how the early Christians struggled to free the Gospel from the bonds of Judaism and from all other bonds that would limit its universal scope and appeal.



personalism triumphs. As long as legalism held the upper hand in the thoughts of people, as is manifested in the nationalistic and sacrificial system of Judaism, the system furnished the main principles of interpretation which would account for the importance many early Christians placed on the idea of sacrifice with reference to the death of Jesus. But when personalism became the clue of interpretation, an entirely new system of theology emerged, as is found implicitly in the writings of Paul, Peter, and of John especially. The personalistic perspective had its roots, to be sure, in the Old Testament itself, but it came to fullest expression in the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus the Christ, that is, in the full Gospel event itself. Therefore, for a person steeped in the traditions of Judaism the tendency would have been to give more prominence to the sacrificial death of Jesus; but to one whose life had been changed by a personal encounter with God through the Living Christ, as was Paul's, the tendency would have been to move beyond the Cross to the full light of a Resurrection faith. This is the transition we see taking place in the first century Church.

A second reason for the undue prominence given to the Cross by early Christians may be found in the influence upon them of the Greco-Roman mystery religions in which the concept of sacrifice was fully developed. These religious rites involved many types of sacrifices (as in Judaism) which were intended to placate the angry gods and win for the worshiper some victory—military, personal, or otherwise. When Christianity spread into the Greco-Roman world and drew many of its thinkers from among the Greeks and the Romans, it was inevitable that the Cross of Jesus be understood as a sacrifice or ransom paid to Satan, or to God, to satisfy his wrath, honor, justice, and so on. When attention was thus fixed upon the Cross, the significance of the Resurrection waned for these thinkers. As was stated earlier in this essay, these early thinkers (Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, Augustine, Anselm, and others) sometimes wrote about the Resurrection as an event, but they failed to recognize its full theological significance because they were more concerned with explaining the Cross as the ground of man's reconciliation and salvation.

Another reason for the prominence given to the Cross in the formative years of Christian theology may be found in the influence of Greek rationalism upon the movement. The Greeks sought "reasons"

for everything. Early Greek Christians were thus more concerned to understand the meaning of the Incarnation, of the Logos made flesh. The result was that a theology of the Incarnation appeared, or, in other words, a Logos theology which was intensely concerned with the life and works of the God-Man, Jesus, the Son of God. By thus distinguishing so sharply between God and the Son, these early thinkers became in turn much concerned with the "works" of the Son; and, of course, it apparently was not difficult for them to determine which was his most important work—the Cross. Because it was commonly understood that God had raised Jesus, the Son, from the dead, the doctrine of the Resurrection was viewed as the work of God and thus outside the concern of those who would explain the work of the Man, the Son. The Cross was the Son's work and his work alone. Did he not cry out in lonely despair, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Jesus thus was understood to have died to ransom man from sin and death or to pay the debt of sin for man that man himself could not pay. The Cross, then, came to be understood as the one work that accomplishes reconciliation and salvation.

The reasons given above are to be considered as hardly more than mere suggestions for the one who would prefer a more detailed (and scholarly) analysis. But the reasons given will serve our purpose at this point. Our only concern has been to *illustrate* why the Cross came to displace the Resurrection in the course of Christian theology. Someone needs to write a book dealing with this matter in scholarly detail. Such a book would be of inestimable value to those of us who are concerned with formulating a Christian theology for our day.

### Importance of the Doctrine

Before analyzing in some detail the doctrine of the Resurrection in the New Testament, let us consider its importance as expressed by some contemporary theologians. At the risk of being repetitious and, at the same time, unsystematic, let me simply give the reader what some are saying on this subject. In discussing the authority of Jesus' teachings, William A. Spurrer has this to say concerning the relationship between the teachings of Jesus and the Resurrection: "[Paul] . . . knew that if there was no Resurrection then there were no valid



reasons for accepting any of the teachings of Jesus. If Jesus was claiming God's authority for His insights, preaching about God's will for man, promising meaning to man, what use is it all if it ends only in a quick death? Indeed, if Jesus had kept silent, He would have lived longer. Does this not make the teachings a mockery? . . . If evil wins out, why pretend that it pays to be good? By what authority and standard do we accept the teachings of Christ? If they are not from God, they are not the whole story and it is idolatry to follow one man. These are the full and grim implications of the Cross without the Resurrection. They are so grim that few people have dared to face up to them."<sup>11</sup>

Professor Filson, who has already done much to call us back to the Resurrection faith of the New Testament, has this to say concerning the importance of the Resurrection for Biblical theology which is enjoying a resurgence today: "Biblical theology finds its clearest starting point and interpreting clue in the resurrection of Jesus Christ."<sup>12</sup> And again, he says: "That central interpreting fact [of the Cross] is the resurrection of Jesus. This is the climactic message to which each of the Gospels moves. This was what the apostles knew they were to preach—they were to witness to the Resurrection (Acts 1:22). This was the fact which the unbeliever found incredible, but the Christians knew was true. In the light of this fact the Crucifixion found its Christian interpretation; the ministry, its climax; the plan of God, its interpreting clue; and the future, its way to power and victory."<sup>13</sup>

Karl Barth, whose strong voice has shaken our modern theological world, has had much to say about the Easter message of the Christian faith, as exemplified in the brief passage which follows: "Easter is the breaking in of a new time and world in the existence of the man Jesus, who now begins a new life as the conqueror, as the victorious bearer, as the destroyer of the burden of man's sin, which had been laid upon Him. In this altered existence of His the first community saw not only a supernatural continuation of His previous life, but an entirely new life, that of the exalted Jesus Christ, and simultaneously the beginning of a new world. . . . Easter is indeed the great pledge

<sup>11</sup> William A. Spurrer, *Guide to the Christian Faith* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 147. Used by permission.

<sup>12</sup> Filson, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

of our hope, but simultaneously this future is already present in the Easter message."<sup>14</sup> One can hardly deny that the above words are freighted with meaning and would require a whole theology to elaborate. On the basis of the Resurrection faith, Barth sees a "new time," a "new world," a "new life," and a great pledge of "hope" for sinful and hopeless mankind. Barth sees the Christian faith as *the all-conquering faith*, because its future is not in man's hands, but in the hands of the Living Christ. One may disagree with some of Barth's theological assumptions and conclusions, but he must confess that Barth is on solid ground at this point.

On the same note of victory let us cite two other contemporary writers: David H. C. Read and Roger Hazelton. "But where was the victory [in the Cross]?" asks Read. "In the Resurrection of Christ from the dead," he answers. "The Cross is not the Gospel without the Resurrection. This is the one supreme fact of history on which the Christian Faith depends. The Christ who was crucified was raised from the dead" [*italics added*].<sup>15</sup> Roger Hazelton also stresses the point that "it is not until the Resurrection that the whole meaning of the cross is made plain. For the Resurrection does not disclose some new and unexpected factor, some secret weapon turning the tide of tragedy into a triumphal march; it sets forth the truth that on the cross God's victory over sin and death is conclusively won."<sup>16</sup>

And, finally, let us cite Beasley-Murray again: ". . . Christ's death and resurrection, viewed as deeds done on behalf of our salvation, are inseparable. We tend to assign all the importance to the death, just as, from another point of view, we incline to regard the cross as a tragedy and the resurrection as a victory. . . . From the viewpoint of the accomplishing of redemption, the death of Jesus was seen to be equally the occasion of His triumph [compare John 13:31] as His resurrection, and the resurrection . . . as important as His death. We ought not, then, to think of our Lord's death as the means of our salvation and the resurrection as its mere confirmation; Paul reminds us that there

<sup>14</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, translated by G. T. Thomson (New York, Philosophical Library, Inc., 1949), pp. 122, 123. Used by permission.

<sup>15</sup> David H. C. Read, *The Christian Faith* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> Roger Hazelton, *God's Way with Man* (Nashville, Tenn., Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 154.



is no forgiveness without the resurrection" (compare I Corinthians 15:17).<sup>17</sup>

The above stringing together of quotations from contemporary writers was done deliberately. The purpose was simply to set before the reader certain key quotations drawn from various sources so as to point out what is being said today in some quarters on the subject of the Resurrection. With the general constellation of ideas presented above in mind, we are now ready to turn our analytical spotlight and synthetical floodlight upon the New Testament message itself. The New Testament, I think, will affirm the general cluster of ideas presented in the above quotations concerning the importance of the Resurrection. As we have already argued, owing to the predominant "theology of the Cross" in Christian history the full story of the New Testament teaching on the Resurrection has been in great part obscured. My purpose in the following sections is to present as fully as possible the New Testament doctrine of the Resurrection so that its full power and radiance may the better be appreciated. Perhaps some will be not a little surprised to find how much the New Testament really does have to say concerning the Resurrection and how much emphasis it puts upon the part the Resurrection plays in the reconciling and saving works of God in Christ, that is, how much emphasis it puts upon the "theology of the Resurrection."

### The Resurrection in the Gospels

If Professor Filson is right when he writes that the "entire New Testament was written from the post-resurrection viewpoint," then we may expect to find evidence of this throughout the Gospels themselves. It is a well-known fact that each Gospel closes with a description of the Resurrection, but what is not so well known is that the Resurrection faith pervades the Gospel narratives themselves. Some think of the Gospels as histories or biographical sketches of the life of Christ, and they are to a degree, but to view them as such is a mistake. Actually the Gospels are basically *interpretations* of the mighty acts of God in Jesus the Christ. Each Gospel is unique and is written from a given perspective. Each has its own stock of ideas and concepts and each is stamped with its author's style. There is diversity of

<sup>17</sup> Beasley-Murray, *op. cit.*, pp. 117, 118.

thought and action, but throughout all there runs a unity of ideas that constitutes the core of their messages. Perhaps nowhere is their basic unity more in evidence than in the Resurrection faith which pervades them all. All are one, therefore, in affirming that in Christ God has come into the world bringing New Life to dying men, yet each Gospel presents its own interpretation of the coming of the New Life of God in Christ in its own unique way.

All four Gospels make much of the miracle-working Power of Jesus the Christ. From the beginning of his ministry to the climactic miracle of the Resurrection, the Christ is pictured as one who has at his command a Power over nature, sickness, and death. He stills the storm (Matthew 8:23-27), heals every kind of disease and infirmity (Matthew 9:35; 11:4, 5), and raises the dead (Matthew 11:5; Mark 5:21-24, 35-43; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:1-44). These miracles, described variously by the Gospel writers as "works," "wonders," "powers," and "signs," were understood as signs of the Coming One, that is, the Messiah (Matthew 11:2-6). In fact, the Gospel of John is built around some eight key signs which the Christ performed in order to teach certain lessons about God's working in him to disclose the New Life which is available to all who will believe. While John's Gospel emphasizes the didactic purpose of the signs of Jesus the Christ, the Synoptic Gospels, in the main, stress the presence of God's Power in Jesus. In other words, Jesus in the Synoptics is seen primarily as the wonder-worker, while in John's Gospel he is pictured primarily as the Teacher who uses this Power to drive home to his followers the Truth he has come to make known to them.

But the point in all this is that in Jesus the Christ his followers saw a Transcendent Mind and Power at work among men. Even though the Gospel writers make it very plain that Jesus the Christ was truly a man who lived under the same limitations as other men and finally died on a Cross, although he himself had raised the dead, there was also the conviction in them that in him the Living God, the Father, was working in Love, Power, and Wisdom to deliver persons from "every disease and sickness"—physical, moral, and spiritual—and to restore them to divine fellowship through the forgiveness of sins. John's Gospel especially presents Christ as the revealer and giver of the life-transforming Power of God to those who believe. To those who believe, Eternal Life is given, and this Eternal Life is in the Son



who lived, and died, and rose from the dead. It is not difficult to see how the Gospel writers, writing from the standpoint of the Resurrection faith, could see a Power at work in the wonder-producing works of Jesus that death alone could never defeat. Once they had overcome the shock of his death through the experience of the Resurrection and the Appearances, they could, and did, look back and see all the events of the Messiah in a new and more meaningful light.

In the New Testament as a whole there unfolds a rising tension between Christ (Christianity) and the Jewish temple (Judaism). This tension is implicit in the message of the Gospels. One of the earliest indications of this tension is found in a saying of Jesus: "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here" (Matthew 12:6). By this "something" Jesus evidently meant not himself as such but what was happening in and through him and his followers. In him the Living God, who cannot be contained in the temple (I Kings 8:27), was breaking anew into human history to work a work that would be marvelous in their eyes. The something greater than the temple is the Love, Power, and Wisdom of God being manifested again and supremely in the Suffering Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of man, the King of the New Israel. Something New is taking place, yet the something New is not unrelated to the Old. The New fulfills the Old and at the same time abrogates it. This is a note which sounds again and again with compelling force in the New Testament.

That Jesus saw value in the temple there can be no doubt. He taught in the temple (Matthew 26:55; Mark 12:35; Luke 19:47; 21:37; John 7:14), healed in the temple (Matthew 21:14; John 5:14, 15), cleansed the temple by driving out the moneychangers who were making the house of God and of prayer a "den of robbers" (Matthew 21:12, 13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45, 46; John 2:14-16), and evidently worshiped with his followers in the temple, for we see his followers continuing to worship there after the Ascension (Luke 24:53; Acts 3:1), all of which indicates that Jesus was not antagonistic toward the temple per se. Yet when Jesus is tempted to associate his messianic office with the temple by a miraculous display of power, he refuses to do so (Matthew 4:5-7; Luke 4:9-12). He is reported to have spoken about the destruction of the temple, but his sayings along this line puzzled his disciples (Matthew 24:1-8; Luke 21:5-7; Mark

13:1-8) and infuriated his enemies, the rulers of the temple (Matthew 26:61; 27:40; Mark 14:58; 15:29; John 2:19, 20).

The "temple" sayings of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, are difficult to understand, unless one looks at them from the standpoint of the Resurrection. That Jesus sensed the violent destruction of the temple at the hands of an enemy power, such as the Roman power, there can be little doubt (Matthew 24:7; Luke 21:10-24); for Jesus knew that the intense patriotism of the Jews would sooner or later lead to open conflict with the Roman armies. This did happen some forty years after Jesus spoke these words (about A.D. 70), but Jesus' intention in speaking then was not merely to predict a historical event in itself. Jesus apparently used his awareness of the ultimate destruction of the temple as a cryptic didactic device by which to warn his disciples of his impending death and to assure them of his subsequent Resurrection from the dead. Jesus, it seems, had to use various cryptic methods and teachings (Matthew 17:1-13; 12:38-42; Luke 11:29-32) by which to forewarn his followers of his imminent demise; for, when he told them *plainly* that he must go to Jerusalem and there be slain, they disbelieved him and rebuked him for speaking thus (Matthew 16:21-23 [4:8-11]; 17:22, 23; 20:17-28). Eventually the disciples of Jesus came to recognize these events (such as the Transfiguration) and teachings (concerning Jonah in the fish, the temple, and so on) as "signs" which Jesus was giving them in advance of the Cross and the Resurrection. John especially takes care to point out that the disciples *finally* understood Jesus to be referring to "the temple of his body" which would be destroyed in death and raised up in three days. He makes it plain that it was after "he was raised from the dead" that the disciples "remembered" and "believed the scripture [about Jonah?] and the word which Jesus had spoken" (John 2:18-22).

To understand these sayings of Jesus concerning the temple and the apostolic interpretations of them after the Resurrection, one must give close attention to two Greek words—*hieron* and *naos*. The word *hieron* was used to describe the *whole temple area*, including the various courts (of men, women, Gentiles), buildings, balconies, and porticoes. Jesus taught, healed, and worshiped in the *hieron*. He warned that the stones of the *hieron* would be thrown down and scattered in the conflict that would come between the Jews and their enemies (Mat-



thew 24:1, 2, and so on). In other words, when he spoke noncryptically about the destruction of the temple, or when the disciples wrote of Jesus' activities in the temple, the inclusive word *hieron* was used. But when Jesus spoke cryptically about the destruction and rebuilding of the temple he was understood both by his enemies and by his disciples to have been referring to the exclusive *naos*, the inner sanctuary of the temple (Matthew 26:61; 27:40; Mark 14:58; 15:29; John 2:19-22). The inner sanctuary (*naos*) was the most sacred place in the whole temple area (*hieron*). It consisted of the holy place of the priests and the Holy of holies into which only the high priest went once a year on the day of atonement. The Holy of holies was the windowless innermost place where God himself dwells (*naos*, from *naïō*, to dwell). In classical Greek too, *naos* was used to designate the inner cell or room in which the image of the god or goddess was placed. In this connection it is also very important to note that at the death of Jesus the "curtain of the *naos* was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45), probably signifying the opening up of the way into the Holy of holies (that is, into God's dwelling place) for Jesus and his followers (compare Hebrews 9:6-14, 24-26; 10:19-25) so that atonement could be accomplished.

This seems to be about the extent of the teachings concerning the temple (*hieron*, *naos*) in the Gospels, so far as its being related to the Resurrection is concerned. But there are certain implications in the Gospel accounts that find fuller expression in the rest of the New Testament books. For example, Matthew alone writes of the tombs being opened and of the dead being raised at the moment of Jesus' expiration, while the curtain of the *naos* is being torn from top to bottom. The opening of the tombs and the splitting of the curtain may have implied "liberation" for those bound by death, and also liberation for God Himself whose dwelling place had been restricted to the innermost Holy of holies, as well as implying "entrance" into the Holy of holies on the part of Jesus the Great High Priest on behalf of the sinner. The liberation of the "dead" from sin and of God himself from the cramping restrictions of Judaism becomes a main theme in the Acts and the Epistles, as we shall see.

In order for us not to break our line of thought at this point, let us digress a bit and deal briefly with the use of the "temple" idea in the Epistles. Paul especially makes much of this idea because it pro-



vides him with the means by which he is able to bridge the gap between old Israel and the New Israel, that is, between the old temple (*hierónaōs*) and the New Temple, the Church, the Body of Christ, the Fellowship (*Koinōnia*), in which the Holy Spirit dwells in full freedom. That Paul is thinking of the "liberation" of God from any people who would restrict him to a shrine is evident in what he says to the philosophers in the middle of the Areopagus in Athens: "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man . . ." (Acts 17:24). Paul, through his encounter with the Risen, Living Christ (Acts 9:1-9), now knows that God through his Spirit is everywhere, and that he dwells in living temples, that is, in believers as individuals as well as in the midst of believers who are members of the Body of Christ, the Church. For example, he writes to the Church at Corinth: "Do you not know that you are God's temple [*naōs*] and that God's spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple [*naōs*], God will destroy him. For God's temple [*naōs*] is holy, and that temple [*naōs*] you are" (I Corinthians 3:16).

But Paul also thought of the individual person as a temple of the Holy Spirit. "Do you not know that your body is a temple [*naōs*] of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (I Corinthians 6:19, 20). In this connection Paul is rebuking the Corinthian Christians for certain gross immoral practices (adultery, homosexuality, thievery, greediness, drunkenness, prostitution, and so on) and arguing that the Holy Spirit cannot be expected to dwell in bodies (persons) thus given over to sensuality and other evils. In another Letter to the Corinthians he deals with the same immoral problems and there refers to the believers collectively as "the temple [*naōs*] of the living God" (II Corinthians 6:16). In the Letter to the Ephesians Paul strikes the same note. "So then you [Gentiles] are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple [*naōs*] in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22).



The significance of the passage just cited can hardly be overemphasized. Paul is sounding the universal note of the Gospel. The "dividing wall of hostility" in the old temple in Jerusalem has been removed in Christ and all (Jews and Gentiles) may now enter not only into all the restricted "courts" in the temple (*hieron*) but also into the Holy of holies, the *naos*, as well and have fellowship with God in a personal encounter. And where is this *naos*, or Holy of holies? It is in the believing person and in the Fellowship, the Body of Christ, the Church.

And, to carry our digression one step further, perhaps it is fitting to discuss briefly at this point the teachings of the Epistle to the Hebrews, for the "temple" idea in Hebrews becomes the central point. Then, too, the Epistle to the Hebrews helps us see the connection between the temple idea and the Risen, Reigning, and Saving Christ. The Risen, Living Christ is the Great High Priest in the True Tabernacle. "According to . . . [Hebrews] the high-priestly work of Christ did not end with His death on the cross, but rather *began* with His death," writes D. M. Baillie.<sup>18</sup>

Even though the Epistle to the Hebrews is cast in a priestly and ritualistic setting where the "sacrificial" and "purifying" death of Jesus is strongly asserted (1:3; 7:27; 9:11-28; 10:10, 12, 19-22; 13:12), it needs to be noted that this book is definitely written from the point of view of the Resurrection. The death of Jesus the Christ was truly the *beginning* of his reconciling and saving work, pictured here in terms of the Eternal High Priest who *continually* serves in the Heavenly Tabernacle making intercession for sinners. The writer of Hebrews does not stop with the event of the Cross, but rather shows more concern for the Person who functions as the Great High Priest to "deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to life-long bondage" by destroying the devil "who has the power of death." One might suppose that the writer of Hebrews thinks only of the death of Jesus as destroying the devil and delivering the sinner, but close reading will reveal that Christ himself, the Living Word (4:12), is the One who is able to help those who are tempted (2:18). "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have

<sup>18</sup> D. M. Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 117. Used by permission.



not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4:14-16). The above passage constitutes the core of ideas presented in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Another line of thought that illustrates the Resurrection perspective which pervades the Gospels is the "taking up of the Cross" passages. Even in the midst of discussion concerning his impending death, Jesus does not fail to stress that the bloody Cross for him and for his disciples stands actually for Life and not for death. Jesus probably stressed this theme many times in his teachings; for to Hebrews the blood shed in the sacrifices, resulting in death for the animal, of course, was also the symbol of life, for the life was in the blood. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life" (Leviticus 17:11; compare Deuteronomy 12:23). Therefore, one would probably be correct in saying that whenever the term "blood" is used in the Scriptures with reference to reconciliation and salvation it usually stands (that is, figuratively) for life, renewal, and restoration of fellowship with God through divine forgiveness on the basis of faith and love. Even when the ancient Hebrews sometimes understood sacrifice in the less worthy terms of divine appeasement (Genesis 8:20-22; II Chronicles 29:3-11, and so on), and sometimes regarded the execution of a gross violator as an act of appeasement to turn away the fierce anger of the Lord, as was so in the case of Achan (Joshua 7:25, 26), the shedding of blood was still understood to involve the renewal of life, the granting of a second chance, the bestowal of the divine favor, and so on.

When we consider the term "blood" in its New Testament usage we must come to the same conclusion, namely, that "life is in the blood." When Jesus is called the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), or when Jesus speaks of his own blood as being shed for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28, and so on), the term "blood" is best understood as a synonym for Life, for the Life of God, that is, Eternal Life which is given to all who "accept" the blood of the Lamb as a sacrifice to God. When the term "blood" is thus understood as a symbol of the life-giving, psychovolitional



faith-response which is "offered" to God in the "sacrifice," the term Cross likewise takes on this meaning. The "blood" thus comes to stand for the inner psychological attitudes that one must offer to God in faith and love, and this means, in other words, that one must experience the Cross *in himself*.

Such a view of the Cross enables us to grasp the meaning of some of the paradoxical teachings on the Cross and Resurrection attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. According to Matthew, for example, shortly before his death "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (16:21). Peter, Matthew reports, rebukes Jesus for this reference to his death, saying: "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you"; for apparently Peter was still thinking to some extent in terms of a religious-political messiah. After Peter in turn is rebuked by Jesus as a hindrance to his work, Jesus then says to his disciples, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? . . . For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matthew 16:24-28; compare Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9:23-27).

This is a remarkable passage, for it illustrates very clearly the Resurrection faith in the Gospels. In order to live again one must die on *his* cross of self-denial. If he is not willing to deny himself, that is, say "no" to self, he may gain the whole world by his selfishness and self-centeredness, but lose his life. In other words, if he tries to live under his own power and on his own terms he will die, but if he dies to self or loses his life *for the sake of Christ*, he will find his life. This line of thought accords well with the ideas presented earlier concerning the life in the blood of the sacrificial offering. In death, the life in the blood is released and is offered up to God as a sacrifice. But the life in the blood is symbolical of the life of the believer being offered up to God. This is the sacrifice well pleasing to God, that is, the giving of one's self or one's life to God in humility, faith, and love (compare



I Samuel 15:22; Psalm 50:8-15; Micah 6:6-8; Isaiah 1:12-17; Hosea 6:6; Romans 12:1, 2; Hebrews 13:12-16, and so on).

Hence, the concepts "blood," "cross," "self-denial," and so on, must be understood first of all in terms of the dynamic dimensions of human personality and life, and second in terms of the Risen Christ who is working in the believer who denies himself. Jesus hints at this when he says, ". . . whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (italics added), and then goes on to say that there were some among his disciples who would not die before they would see "the Son of man coming in his kingdom." In other words, the death of self-denial would not be an effort on the part of the believer alone, but rather would be a self-denial prompted and realized in and through the working of the Risen Christ who would soon inherit his kingdom. Their death to self and resurrection to life through death would be accomplished by and through him who would soon be killed in Jerusalem and be raised on the third day and thus enter into his kingdom as the Risen King and Lord. From his throne at the "right hand of God" he would direct and carry on his work of reconciliation and salvation in the midst of men through the Holy Spirit. In a later section we shall take up the Reign of Christ in more detail.

The account of the Transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36) provides one of the most important examples of the Resurrection perspective in the Gospel narratives. On this occasion Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. There he is transfigured before them, his face shining like the sun, and his garments becoming white as light. And with him appear Moses and Elijah in glory talking with him concerning "his departure [exodos] which he was to accomplish [fulfill, complete, consummate] at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). This awe-inspiring spectacle apparently was designed to give the three disciples a preview of the Resurrection, for before them stood Moses and Elijah "in glory," great prophets who had passed on centuries before. Jesus had earlier spoken plainly about his death and Resurrection (Matthew 16:21), but now the disciples are permitted to see the Lord "in glory." And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them to be silent concerning this vision until after the Resurrection (Matthew 17:9). Evidently this vision, as dazzling as it was, did not make very much of an impression on the disciples; for, when death later took



Jesus, they fell into deep despair, only to be revived in spirit after they became convinced through the post-Resurrection Appearances that the Christ was alive. After the Resurrection and Ascension, the Transfiguration came to have full meaning for them, for they then saw the Christ reigning "in glory" and saving men by his Eternal Presence in the Power of the Holy Spirit (compare I Peter 1:21; II Peter 1:16-18, and so on).

Before closing our discussion on the Resurrection faith reflected in the Gospels, let us deal briefly with that Gospel which may fittingly be called the "Gospel of the Resurrection"—John's Gospel. Why speak of John's Gospel thus? Because in it the Christ who is presented is a truly magnificent Person, One who is man, yet One who walks with transcendent, almost ethereal, bearing in the midst of human sin and error. John's Gospel has also been called the "Gospel of the Incarnation," and rightly so, because John does stress that the Word (*Logos*) became "flesh" and dwelt among men; but also, in that same connection, he writes that the Word was full of grace, truth, and glory, the "glory as of the only Son from the Father" (1:14). Truly the *Logos* of Glory is the subject of John's presentation. The Word is the Word of Life, Light, Power, Love, Grace, Truth, and the Way, who in majestic simplicity teaches, heals the sick and the lame, and raises the dead.

As stated earlier, Jesus is not presented in John's Gospel as a mere wonder-worker, demonstrating his supernatural powers as such; but, rather, he is shown as the worker of "signs," indeed demonstrating his Power, but wrought primarily in order that certain lessons or truths could be drawn from them. Perhaps the one main idea that lies deep within the meaning of all the signs and teachings is the idea of Life. By the signs and teachings Jesus reveals to his followers that he is the embodiment of the Wine and Water of Life (2:1-11; 3:5, 6; 4:7-15), the Bread of Life (6:1-69), the Light of Life (8:12; 9:1-41; 12:27-36), the Resurrection and the Life (11:1-44), and so on. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it," writes John (1:4, 5). And just as John's characteristic expression concerning sin is "unbelief," so his characteristic expression concerning salvation is "eternal life." By unbelief men fall into the darkness (blindness, 9:35-41) of sin, but by believing in the Word, the Son of God, the Light of Life, the darkness of sin

is overcome and Eternal Life is possessed, or rather, possesses them. Thus Jesus prays: "And this is eternal life, that they may know [believe, experience, encounter, participate in] thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent" (17:3).

John's Christ thus has about him the "glow of glory" even while he walks in human flesh. From God the Father there flows through him the Water of Life and there shines in him the Light of Life. He speaks of himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and declares that no one comes to the Father but by him (14:6). To know him is to know the Father also, for he and the Father are one (10:30; 14:7, 9, 11, 20; 17:11). He came from the Father and he returns to the Father. He is the Life Eternal and Truth in time, in human history. He was Before, he is Now, he will be After (1:1, 2, 9, 10, 14, 15). He is not only the Christ who was and will be; he is the Christ who is, and in him now is Life and Truth and Power and Love. In other words, John's Christ is the pre-existent and Risen Christ at the same time, that is, the Existential Christ, the Point at which Eternity is breaking into Time. For example, when Jesus spoke of himself as the Truth (14:6), he was not speaking about doctrinal or propositional truth per se.

Paul Tillich recognizes this ontological-existential character of John's interpretation of the Christ when he says: ". . . the truth of which Jesus speaks is not a doctrine but a reality, namely, He Himself: 'I am the truth.' This is a profound transformation of the ordinary meaning of truth. For us, statements are true or false; people may have truth or not; but how can they be truth, even *the* truth? The truth of which the Fourth Gospel speaks is a true reality—that reality which does not deceive us if we accept it and live with it."<sup>19</sup> The above line of thought also has important bearing on the concept of "Word" which John's Gospel (and the Scriptures as a whole) makes much of. The Word is no verbal message as such, which can be heard, learned, remembered, or forgotten. The Word of God is God *Himself* speaking in the *existential moment*. This is the Word which John sees in Jesus the Christ. This is not a word, a message, a teaching that can be stopped with death, but the Word of Truth that was before death and will be after death, because time and history as such do not overcome him, but rather are overcome by him. This is why John's Christ can

<sup>19</sup> Paul Tillich, *The New Being* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 69. Used by permission.



say, "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25), and ". . . I lay down my life, that I may take it [up] again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it [up] again; this charge I have received from my Father" (10:17, 18). Nothing like this is found on the lips of Jesus as the Synoptic Gospels present him. And again, this is why we may speak of John's Gospel as the "Gospel of the Resurrection."

In John 6 there appears a passage that has received a wide variety of interpretations, ranging from the purely mystical types to the quasi-materialistic types, such as are usually formulated by the sacramentalists. But we shall not be concerned with these matters in this discussion. Our only concern here is to illustrate the Resurrection faith as it is reflected in this highly metaphorical passage.

After the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-14), John reports that Jesus taught the people that he was "the bread which came down from heaven," or the "bread of life" (6:41, 47). Jesus contrasted himself with the manna that the Hebrew fathers had eaten in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses and had died (Exodus 16:4-8; Numbers 11:4-6; Nehemiah 9:15; Psalm 78:21-31). The manna, even though it had come down from heaven, was not the True Bread, for if one eats of the True Bread he will never die. "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world" (John 6:33). Jesus is the True Bread which comes down from heaven, and all who come to him and eat shall never hunger (6:35). But the Jews murmured at this teaching for they knew about Jesus' earthly parentage and could not grasp the meaning of his descent from heaven (6:41, 42). But he soon stuns them with a teaching that makes them wonder whether he is beside himself (7:1) when he says, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will *live forever*; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world *is my flesh*" (italics added) (6:51). Then Jesus scandalizes them by saying that if they would have "eternal life" and be raised up at the last day they must *eat his flesh and drink his blood*, for whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood will abide in him and he in them (6:53-58). Even his disciples took offense at these sayings and many drew back and no longer went about with him (6:60, 61, 66).

Then, seemingly in order to set the minds of his puzzled but

faithful disciples at ease, he gives them a clue to the meaning of all these sayings. In the midst of all these teachings Jesus had referred to the resurrection of the "last day" a number of times (6:39, 40, 44, 54). But now he asks the question: "Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?" (6:62) Jesus knew that sooner or later he would be taken away from them, as he was in death and finally in the Ascension after the Resurrection. They would then think on these "words" which had horrified them; for they had been asked to "drink blood," which the Law expressly forbade (Leviticus 17:10, 14; Deuteronomy 12:23, 24; compare Acts 15:19-21, 29; 21: 25).

But why had Jesus used such scandalous words? We may conclude that he was doing so to make clear to them the "spiritual" nature of their contact with him. They could see him in the flesh, but they were having difficulty seeing the Eternal Life of God in him. "It is the spirit that gives life," he tells them, "the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are *spirit* and *life*" (italics added) (John 6:63). The statements concerning the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood were vivid metaphors intended to convey to their minds the essential personal and spiritual quality of their relationship with him, the Bread of Life. If they would eat of this bread, he would abide in them and they in him, and in this way they would come to possess Eternal Life. But the references to the Resurrection of the "last day" and the statement about his Ascension (6:62) indicate that he was thinking of the eternal and transcendent state of this Living Bread which comes down from heaven. Jesus was not speaking about a horizontal, historical connection between him and anyone, but rather about a vertical, transcendent, yet personal, existential connection involving their mutual indwelling in the New Being (Paul Tillich) which would enable them to keep on believing in and keep on knowing God, which is Eternal Life.

In conclusion, we may say that these words were "words of eternal life" (6:68) to the disciples, not because Eternal Life was in the words themselves, but because these words expressed the fundamental personal and existential fellowship between the Eternal God-Christ-Spirit and the believer-knower, thus transforming him from death unto life, and delivering him from sorrow unto joy (16:20), from despair unto hope, from his existential predicament and estrangement into the New Life which is the New Being of God. This could not be accomplished



by any historical Jesus dying on a cross or giving out moral homilies to be written down, memorized, and passed on in creed and ritual. John's Christ appeared in history but he is not historical; he is rather the Eternal Reigning Christ (compare 12:12-18), ruling in every heart and over every nation. To change the metaphor, he is the True Light that enlightens every man coming into the world (1:9):

Shakespeare is dust, and will not come  
To question from his Avon tomb,  
And Socrates and Shelley keep  
An Attic or Italian sleep.

They see not. But, O Christians who  
Throng Holborn or Fifth Avenue,  
May you not meet, in spite of death,  
A Traveller from Nazareth?<sup>20</sup>

After the Resurrection the Gospels relate how Jesus appeared to his disciples, giving them instructions and promises before his bodily presence would be taken from them in the Ascension. He commissioned them to wait for the Power (Holy Spirit) from on high and then to go into all the world to make disciples of all peoples. They were to go forth with full assurance that all authority had been given unto him and that he would be with them all the way. Alan Richardson interprets the Ascension thus: "The ascension of Christ means that he is now no longer localized in space and time, as in the days of his incarnate life in Galilee and Judaea, but that now his Spirit fills the universal Church: 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. . . .'"<sup>21</sup>

On this cosmic note the Gospels come to a close, but from the standpoint of the New Testament message the work of the Christ is just beginning. Dr. John A. Mackay, thrilled and challenged by the cosmic picture of Christ with which the Gospels close, has expressed his youthful wonder and commitment in moving simplicity: "From the first my imagination began to glow with the cosmic significance of Jesus Christ. It was the cosmic Christ that fascinated me, the living Lord Jesus Christ who was the center of a great drama of unity, in

<sup>20</sup> Cited by Alan Richardson, *The Gospel and Modern Thought* (London, Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 163. Used by permission.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

which everything in Heaven and on earth was to become one in him. I did not understand what it all meant, but the tendency to think everything in terms of Jesus Christ and a longing to contribute to a unity in Christ became the passion of my life. It became natural then, and it has remained natural ever since, to say 'Lord Jesus,' to a personal Presence."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> John A. Mackay, *God's Order* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1953), pp. 7, 8.



## CHAPTER VI

# SAVED BY HIS LIFE: THE REIGNING CHRIST

Examine the order of the world in this matter, and see whether all things do not tend to establish the two leading principles of our religion: Jesus Christ as the object of all, the centre to which everything tends. Whoever knows Him understands all things.<sup>1</sup>

Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.<sup>2</sup>

For many it has been traditional to deal with Christology under the headings of the three messianic offices—Prophet, Priest, and King. It is difficult to improve on this arrangement, but it has its weak points, which we shall not deal with here. To some extent we have already dealt with the first two, those of Prophet and Priest. As we have seen, the Gospels make much of the prophetic role of Jesus the Messiah, connecting him at the very beginning of his ministry with the prophetic movement of John the Baptist. When John the Baptist was asked whether he was the prophet (John 1:21), he replied in the negative, and then proceeded to point out to them the One who was before him and would be after him, and who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Matthew takes care to point out that Jesus began his ministry with precisely the same message that John the Baptist had preached: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (3:2; 4:17). Jesus was recognized as the One about whom Moses and all the Prophets had written (John 1:45). After Jesus had fed the five thousand, the

<sup>1</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensées*, translated by H. F. Stewart (New York, Pantheon Books, Inc., 1950), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 1:17, 18.

people exclaimed: "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!" (John 6:14). Jesus referred to himself as a prophet not without honor save in his own country. John's Gospel and the other writings usually attributed to him especially abound in the prophet motif. Jesus is the Word of God. He declares God's message to men. But for John, as we have seen, Jesus the Word was more than a messenger with a message: he was the Word become flesh, the Word that had become a Person, an Event, an Act of God bringing Eternal Life to men, and pointing back again into the Eternity of God, indicating that God Himself not only worked in Jesus the Prophet, but always works in the Living and Eternal Word which is not bound by the limitations of time and space.

The priestly office of Christ has already been touched upon in this essay in connection with the "temple" teachings in the New Testament (compare pp. 80-85). The Epistle to the Hebrews is the primary source for the teachings on the priestly office of the Risen Christ. Because of the dominant place the "theology of the Cross" has held in traditional Christian theology, this particular office has had great appeal for those who have stressed the death of Jesus (and neglected his Resurrection) as a sacrificial offering rendered to God to satisfy His honor or justice and to atone for the sins of men. For example, Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica* knows of no other office for Christ. Christ's work is understood almost completely in terms of the priestly ritual and sacrifices, and Aquinas' influence has been great in Roman Catholic theology and also in Protestant theology. Calvin too was given to stressing the priestly office of Christ, which set the pattern for much subsequent Protestant Christology. But the third office, Christ as King, also receives great emphasis in the New Testament. To this office we now turn our attention to show how the Resurrection is related to the kingship of Christ.

### **The Coronation of the King**

In the Old Testament God is described as King over Israel and King over all the earth. As King of kings He establishes kings on their thrones, fights for them when they are faithful and righteous, and punishes and deposes them when they are not. He set up the kings of Israel, and after the fall of the Davidic line He promised Israel another



King like unto David who would rule in righteousness and justice forever. King Messiah is the subject of Psalm 2:

"I have set my king  
on Zion, my holy hill."  
I will tell of the decree of the Lord:  
He said to me, "You are my son,  
today I have begotten you.  
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,  
and the ends of the earth your possession.  
You shall break them with a rod of iron  
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Likewise, in Daniel (7:13, 14) we read:

. . . and behold, with the clouds of heaven  
there came one like a son of man,  
and he came to the Ancient of Days  
and was presented before him.  
And to him was given dominion  
and glory and kingdom,  
that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him;  
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
which shall not pass away,  
and his kingdom one  
that shall not be destroyed.

As is illustrated above, the Old Testament lays great stress on the kingship of God and of His Messiah. This line of thought is carried over into the New Testament. When the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she shall bear a son whose name shall be Jesus, he is described in these terms:

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High;  
and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,  
and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever;  
and of his kingdom there will be no end.  
(Luke 1:32, 33)

The writers of the New Testament pick up this refrain and with steady crescendo move to that mighty, full-organ fortissimo that resounds throughout the universal realm: "The kingdom of the world

has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). "Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:1-5).

Let us trace this fugue-like refrain that gradually swells into the mighty harmony of the ages. The refrain begins on a very familiar note to the Jews—Jesus is to be their earthly king, the king of Israel who would again set up the Davidic kingdom, build up the economic, political, religious, and military might of the Jewish nation, and throw off the yoke of Rome, giving independence to Israel, thus fulfilling the ancient prophecies. This note is reflected in the angelic annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:30-33), in the Magnificat of Mary (Luke 1:46-55), in the search of the wise men for the One born to be king of the Jews (Matthew 2:1, 2), and especially in the song of Zechariah:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has visited and redeemed his people,  
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old  
that we should be saved from our enemies,  
and from the hand of all who hate us;  
to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us  
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.  
(Luke 1:68-75)

Later in Jesus' ministry, when he makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding on an ass, a great crowd at the feast hails him with:



"Hosanna! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" (John 12:13) This event too was considered a fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah (9:9):

Fear not, daughter of Zion;  
behold thy king is coming,  
sitting on an ass's colt!  
(John 12:15)

And after the Resurrection the still-confused followers of Jesus were certain that he would then set up the kingdom of Israel in keeping with the ancient prophecy. They asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) But Jesus soon disabused them on this point by promising them the coming of the Power of the Holy Spirit to guide them in the days ahead, and then he disappeared from their sight in the Ascension, leaving them dumfounded and alone. Their leader was gone from them again, but they soon began to realize that he was still in their midst, even though they could see him no longer in the flesh. With the coming of the Power of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff.), a new era in the Church began. New Life flowed into the community and a new view of the nature of Christ's kingdom began to emerge, but not without difficulty. However, there were signs of this new view of the kingdom implicit in the teachings of the Gospels, and even before that, in the teachings of certain Old Testament prophets. To this matter we now turn our attention.

We have already noted that the universal reign of King Messiah is expressed in Daniel 7:13, 14. In Isaiah there are several important and exquisite passages stressing the universal sway of the Servant Messiah:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my spirit upon him,  
he will bring forth justice to the nations.  
He will not cry or lift up his voice,  
or make it heard in the street;  
a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;  
He will faithfully bring forth justice.  
He will not fail or be discouraged

till he has established justice in the earth;  
and the coastlands wait for his law.

(Isaiah 42:1-4)

"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to restore the preserved of Israel;  
I will give you as a light to the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Thus says the Lord,  
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,  
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,  
the servant of rulers:

"Kings shall see and arise;  
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves;  
because of the Lord, who is faithful,  
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."  
(Isaiah 49:6, 7)

Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.  
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the Lord will arise upon you,  
and his glory will be seen upon you.  
And nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your rising.  
(Isaiah 60:1-3)

Even though Isaiah does not make much use of the "king" metaphor with reference to the Suffering Servant Messiah he presents in his book (compare 32:1; 33:17), he makes it very plain that the Holy One of Israel, the Servant of the Lord, will "reign" in power, love, and justice over all peoples and nations, and that kings and princes would rise and bow before him, thus acknowledging his authority over them (compare Isaiah 49:6, 7). The "King" whom Isaiah presents is the heavenly King, the Holy One of God whose "glory" will fill all the earth. There is a delicate balance of the particular (earthly king) and the universal (heavenly King) in places in Isaiah's book, but this only enhances the worth of his message, as far as the writers of the New Testament are concerned. Jesus showed a fondness for Isaiah's writing,



probably because there appears there this balance between the particular and the universal, for Jesus himself understood the Messiah to be both a universal Ruler and Saviour and at the same time present in a particular encounter with every person. As we shall see, this is precisely the direction of development in the New Testament records. At first Jesus is looked upon as the "King of the Jews," but it soon becomes obvious that Jesus himself does not want to be so styled. He avoids the use of the term "Messiah" when referring to himself, because of the connotations of the term in the minds of the people. They wanted to make him a king at least on one occasion (John 6:15), but Jesus withdrew into the hills to thwart them. Gradually the light dawns upon his followers that his kingdom is not to be of this world, but rather to be a spiritual kingdom where Universal King and particular subjects would meet in a fellowship of love, joy, peace, and service.

When we contemplate this amazing pattern of ideas we see that it fits into a framework of abstract concepts which one must employ if he is to visualize cognitively the movements of God in the realm of Being. One must see God as Abstract, Universal Being, becoming Concrete, Particular Being in Jesus the Christ, and again returning to the Abstract, Universal Being in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, then, is neither Abstract-Universal nor Concrete-Particular, but both at the same time. The New Testament leaves us with this conclusion: God-in-Jesus-the-Christ-and-Holy-Spirit is this Universal-Particular movement in the realm of Being or in man's realm of existence. Therefore, Jesus-the-King-Christ is both Particular (the Man, Jesus in history, and so on) and Universal (the Son, Son of Man, Christ, Holy Spirit) at the same time and place. Of course, such concepts are not employed by the writers of the New Testament, but the ideational materials are implicit in their writings just the same.

The expanding concept of Jesus as Universal King is expressed in the New Testament in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. Since God was pictured as King in the Old Testament, the Son of God as a matter of course would become the rightful heir to the throne (Psalm 2). This is the picture we see in the New Testament with reference to the "Son of God" title of Jesus. In the Transfiguration experience the disciples heard the voice of God saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matthew

17:5). Here the glorified Jesus is shown to be superior to Moses and Elijah. There is no reference as such to Christ as King in this passage, but the Transfiguration is closely related to the Resurrection (Matthew 17:9, 23), which did come to have a most important function in the establishing of Jesus as the Christ-King. After the Transfiguration Jesus told his disciples not to speak of this experience until after the Resurrection. At that time they would understand clearly that the Resurrection was the sign of Jesus' exaltation and supremacy over Moses and Elijah, and over all others as well.

The position and authority of Jesus, relative to that of other Old Testament notables, did become a serious question at times, especially with reference to the prominent position King David and his line held in the ancient prophecies. The Messiah was to have been of the line of David, even *another* David who would bring the kingdom of Israel back to its former power and glory. According to the genealogies of Matthew (1:1-17) and Luke (3:23-38), Jesus was of the line of David, making him eligible for the messianic title, at least on the basis of genealogy. But as time went on, the enemies of Jesus, the Pharisees and Sadducees, became convinced that, if Jesus were a king, he certainly was not a king like David, for he seemed more intent on destroying the nation, the temple, and the traditions than on building them up as David had done. Jesus of course sensed this opposition and sought to overcome it by asking the Pharisees a question concerning the Messiah: "Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

"The Lord said to my Lord,  
Sit at my right hand,  
till I put thy enemies under thy feet?"

If David thus calls him Lord, how is he his son?" (Matthew 22:42-45) Matthew then tells us that "no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did any one dare to ask him any more questions" (on this matter) (22:46).

Jesus may have silenced the Pharisees on this question, but he infuriated them only the more. This passage therefore indicates that Jesus knew himself to be a King in a sense in which David was not. He was a King who at the same time was David's Lord. In him a divine



Kingship was being expressed to which even the mighty David must bow, even as all the kings of the earth were to bow before God the King, King Jehovah. Later we shall see that Peter also stressed in his sermons the supremacy of Christ over David, appealing in one case to the Old Testament Scripture (Psalm 110:1) that Jesus had used against the Pharisees (Acts 2:25-36).

Another passage from the Old Testament (Psalm 118:22-24) was used by Jesus to assert the supremacy of the Son, and was later used by the disciples to prove the supremacy of the Risen Christ. Jesus' enemies often challenged his authority. On one occasion he told the people a parable about certain wicked farm tenants who shamefully treated the owner's servants, sent to obtain some profits from the farm, and who later killed the "son," who had been sent to do what the servants had failed to do. Because of their rejection of the owner's authority by killing his son, the tenants would be destroyed by the owner and the farm given to others. After Jesus had spoken this parable, the scribes and chief priests sought to lay hands on him, because they perceived that he had referred to them in the parable, and because he obviously considered them "wicked tenants," deserving only destruction. To support his argument, however, Jesus cited a portion of Psalm 118:

"The very stone which the builders rejected  
has become the head of the corner. . . .'  
(Matthew 21:42)

And then he added, according to Luke, a statement not found in Psalm 118: "Every one who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one it will crush him" (20:18). Jesus possibly had a passage in Isaiah (8:13-15) in mind when he said this. Nevertheless, his enemies understood his point, and saw that he was turning the tables on them. They had begun by challenging *his* authority, but now they find that *they* are being cited for contempt of his authority, for *he* is the Stone they are rejecting which is placed at the head of the corner, and *he* is the Stone that will crush them, if they do not bow before his authority.

As noted above, the disciples of Jesus later on found this "rejected stone" passage a support for their assertion of the authority of the Son, the Risen Lord. For Peter, after Pentecost, a similar situation existed. The rulers, elders, and scribes had arrested him and John for preaching

and healing (the lame man at the gate of the temple called Beautiful) in the "name of Jesus," and for "proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2). They were challenging the "authority" of Peter and John, just as they had challenged the authority of Jesus. "By what power or by what name did you do this?" they demanded. Then Peter preached them a pointed sermon showing how the "rejected stone" has now "become the head of the corner," even Jesus the Son, the Risen Christ, in whose name and by whose Power they are now able to preach and heal. ". . . be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel," preached Peter, "that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified [by rejecting his authority], whom God raised from the dead [thus vindicating his authority], by him this man is standing before you well. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12). A clearer expression of Christ's post-Resurrection Power and Presence can hardly be found.

In I Peter the "rejected stone" idea is used in a different way. Here the writer appeals to his readers with these words: "Come to him, to that *living stone*, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like *living stones* be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (*italics added*) (I Peter 2:4, 5). Then the writer reminds them of the scripture which speaks of the cornerstone chosen and precious which God is laying in Zion, that is, in the New Zion under the Reign of the Living Christ (Stone). To those who believe, he is precious, but to those who do not believe, he is the "stone that will make them stumble," the "rock that will make them fall." The problem of Christ's authority is still in point of view, but the setting is different. Here the writer is appealing to those who live far from the scene of Jesus' and Peter's struggles over authority with the religious rulers in Jerusalem to accept by faith the Living Christ (Stone), to take their places in the Holy Nation, the Royal Priesthood, the Chosen Race, and to declare the wonderful deeds of him (God) who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (compare I Peter 2:6-9).

There are several "Son of man" passages in the Gospels anticipatory



of the Resurrection-coronation passages we are soon to consider, and which incidentally provide another illustration of the incipient Resurrection faith in the Gospels. We must perhaps go back again to Daniel 7:13, 14, in order to get the setting behind these "Son of man" passages. There Daniel describes the Son of man as presenting himself to the Ancient of Days to receive a glorious universal and eternal kingdom. In the Gospels, Jesus is that Son of man to whom the glorious kingdom is to be given. Mark places (as do Matthew and Luke) the following words of Jesus just before the account of the Transfiguration: "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. . . . Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 8:38-9:1). It seems almost certain that the Gospel writers wanted the reader to connect this highly charged passage with the account of the Transfiguration where the Son of man was displayed "in the glory of the Father" and where a small group of three disciples did "see the kingdom of God come with power," at least by anticipation.

Also, when one considers that the purpose of the Transfiguration was to prepare the disciples for the coming death and Resurrection of Christ, these words take on great significance. The disciples were facing a trying situation in the death of Jesus, and Jesus knew it very well. Some of his disciples would be tempted to "save their lives" (and here we must go back to the verses just before the "Son of man" passage), but in so doing they would "lose them." They would be tempted to deny him rather than to deny themselves; they would be tempted to throw down their crosses at his death rather than to pick them up in self-denial and carry them even as he would carry his own. They would be tempted to show shame and embarrassment when he was led away to be crucified as a common criminal, but, if they were ashamed of him and of his words concerning his impending death and Resurrection, he would in turn be ashamed of and embarrassed at them when he, the Son of man, enters into the glory of his Father's kingdom in glorious power and triumph through the Resurrection. But in spite of this warning to his disciples, they did try to save their own lives, they were ashamed of him (Peter denied him), they did lose heart and go back to their fishing, they did forget his promise to



rise again, and he did die and rise again and enter into his kingdom before any of them tasted of death. A clearer preview of the Resurrection-coronation of the King of kings could hardly be expected, yet this cryptic passage would have little meaning apart from the setting in which it is given.

Another "Son of man" teaching which has a bearing on the Resurrection-coronation theme we are tracing is found in the so-called "great apocalypse" of Matthew (24; 25), and in the "little apocalypses" of Mark (13) and Luke (21). In the shadow of the Cross Jesus makes one final effort to prepare his disciples for the shock of his death. As he and his disciples were going out of the temple, his disciples were impressed, as always, no doubt, by the magnificence and grandeur of the temple buildings. As they were pointing out the buildings to him and making proud comments about them, Jesus stunned them with a comment about the time coming when not one stone of these buildings would be left standing upon another. After some reflection on this saying, the disciples later on asked Jesus privately: "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?" (Mark 13:4) Apparently they were interested in two specific points: *when* (*pote*) these events would take place and *what* (*ti*) would be the sign (*sēmion*) of their fulfillment (*sunteleisthai*). But Jesus warns them that many events would take place, wars, rumors of wars, appearances of many false messiahs, earthquakes, famines, sufferings, defenses before councils and beatings *for them*, and so on; but, he says, the end would not come until the Gospel had been preached in all the nations (Mark 13:10).

Apparently Jesus was thinking of a long history for man in this connection. And contrary to much opinion, I think that this so-called apocalyptic-eschatological discourse of Jesus was not intended by him to be an apocalyptic interpretation of history in the traditional sense, that is, that God would intervene in a cataclysmic show of power to destroy the enemies of the Jews and establish the Jewish kingdom as of old; but, rather was intended to be a *refutation* of the apocalyptic interpretation of history.

Jesus here surely was attempting to teach his disciples that the Victory of God would be realized within the lives of believers dedicated to him and ready to be his witnesses under all circumstances (Mark 13:9-13). The Victory was to be a spiritual Victory, because the



powers of evil at work in human life and affairs were spiritual powers and had to be met on that field of battle. Jesus used the traditional apocalyptic symbols and imagery in this particular set of teachings (sun to be darkened, moon not to give its light, stars to fall from heaven, roaring of the sea and billows, powers of the heavens shaken, and so on), but he did not intend them to be taken literally. He was describing *spiritual* and *moral* struggles that would follow in the wake of these great historical tribulations, and was attempting to prepare his disciples for these spiritual and moral struggles that were to come sooner or later.

The situation here is similar in principle to the situation we described above in connection with the "coming of the Son of man" passage recorded just before the account of the Transfiguration (Matthew 16:27, 28; Mark 8:38-9:1; compare Luke 12:8, 9). There Jesus definitely, I believe, was thinking of the *immediate* future *primarily*, although even there (Matthew 16:27; Mark 8:38) may be found that ambiguity or duality of meaning so characteristic of much of Jesus' teachings. At times it is often very difficult, if not impossible, to tell whether Jesus was thinking of the present or of the future, or of both at the same time (compare Matthew 24:6, 34; Luke 21:20, 32, and so on). Perhaps *time* was not the important consideration for Jesus. He was an "existentialist" and more concerned with the vertical dimension of man's personal encounter with God in *this* life and at *this* moment and less concerned with the histories of men and of nations as such. This is not to say that Jesus was not a "realist" and not aware of man's involvement in finitude. No one was more conscious of this than he. Yet he was more concerned about how men in their finitude reacted to the struggles and disappointments of life that came without warning (compare Matthew 24:27, 39-44, 46, 50). This was the kind of situation Jesus evidently had in mind when he spoke the words recorded in Matthew 16:27, 28 and in Mark 8:38-9:1. His disciples were facing the *immediate* test of his violent death. How would they react? Jesus was concerned that they look beyond the tragedy of his death to the Resurrection that was soon to follow. This would explain, it seems to me, his telling them that none of them would die before they would see the Son of man coming into his kingdom.

But in the case of the passages now under consideration (the "apocalypses"), apparently Jesus was looking far beyond the time of his



death and even far beyond the time of his Resurrection. He knew that after his Resurrection and Ascension his followers would experience a period of high elation and optimism and that victories would come in rapid-fire succession. Such truly was the case, as the book of Acts reveals. But Jesus also knew that before long this period of easy victories and high hopes, this "mountaintop" experience, would give way to the "sea-level" episodes of everyday life and, for many of them, to the "floor of the valley" struggles and bitter disappointments of life in this "adulterous and sinful generation" (Mark 8:38; Matthew 24:9-12) which would put them through the "fiery trials" of persecution. Theirs would be the temptation to lose courage and hope and to fail in their mission to preach and live the Gospel as witnesses before all nations until the final judgment day. Theirs would be the temptation to wait without watching, to waste time in idleness, to fail to visit the sick, to neglect those in prison, to forget the hungry and the needy; but they would not escape the judgments of the Son of man who comes in great power and glory upon them.

What Jesus was discussing here in cryptic apocalyptic language concerns those tribulations and desolations of men which are the result of their own follies, the result of the working out of the laws of cause and effect in the spiritual and moral realms (compare Luke 21:23; Mark 13:24, 25, 28, 29; Matthew 24:39; 25:31-46, and so on) and which find expression in the realm of the "flesh," of history, in wars and rumors of wars, and in the bitter struggles between fathers and sons, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, subjects and kings, Jews and Romans, Pharisees and Christians, Catholics and Protestants, whites and blacks, capitalists and communists, employers and laborers, churches and states, with the result that the Son of man must come upon these morally and spiritually degenerate persons (compare Matthew 24:28) with great power and glory and send his holy angels to gather the faithful elect to himself with commendations and suitable rewards (Matthew 25:31-40) and to mete out suitable punishments to those who have rejected outright his Rule over them or have carelessly neglected to witness to his gracious and righteous Reign of Love by failing to feed the hungry, visit the sick and the imprisoned, and to clothe the naked (Matthew 25:41-46).

These synoptic "apocalypses" reveal that Jesus was neither a visionary nor a fatalist, but rather a realist. He was not talking about any one



person or nation or period of time as such, but rather about all peoples and places and times as they exist together under the Reign of the Risen Son of man who comes in continuous blessing and judgment upon the peoples of the earth. At one moment he was talking about an event which would finally come to pass, as far as the nationalistic minded Jews were concerned; namely, about the destruction of their temple and their beloved Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1, 2, 15-22; Luke 19:41-44; 21:10, 20-24, and so on), and at another moment he appeared to be talking about events that were far in the future, even about the Event, that far-off end of time, when the last trumpet will sound and the last judgment day will come, and when the "heavens will be rolled up like a scroll."

But whether he was talking about this or that nation, or about this or that period of time, he was clearly asserting that all are bound by the same spiritual and moral laws of cause and effect and all alike bound to recognize and relate themselves to them in the light of God's gracious purposes for all mankind, which had been revealed in various ways and times, and which were now being revealed supremely in his life and death and Resurrection soon to follow. That they were spiritually and morally equipped to understand this and accept him as their Living Saviour he had no doubt. They were spiritually and morally responsible beings. This is made clear in the midst of these "apocalyptic" teachings when he said: "From the fig tree *learn its lesson*: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, *you know that he is near, at the very gates*. Truly, I say to you, this generation shall not pass away before all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (*italics added*) (Mark 13:28-31). They, then, were capable of reading the signs of nature and of understanding his words, and by implication they were capable of reading the signs of the Son of man, that is, in terms of the rewards and punishments understood in relation to the spiritual and moral laws they could see in operation all about them and in them.

And now the question the disciples asked Jesus at the very beginning of this "apocalyptic" discourse, concerning the "times" and the "signs" of these events, is answered for them and for us in the light of the Resurrection toward which they pointed. The "time" is *all* times and the "sign" is *all* the signs of the Presence of the Risen Son of man

active in history and in the lives of human beings the world around through the Holy Spirit of Truth, Power, and Judgment, until the End comes for every person and he is ushered into the Presence of God to receive his just dues. Thus, the Son of man who comes into his kingdom is not the particular man Jesus who saves us by an act of kindness or goodness or unselfish sacrifice on the Cross to purchase our redemption from sin, but rather the Universal Son of man enthroned in heaven through the Resurrection, and Reigning eternally in Love, Wisdom, and Power over all the earth, and ever coming in mercy and judgment upon men of earth so that they may be able to endure until the End and so be saved (Mark 13:13; Matthew 24:13).

And now we come specifically to those passages toward which all the passages considered above have pointed; namely, those passages dealing with the relationship between the Resurrection of Christ and his kingship, or, in other words, with the coronation of the King. We select first of all a passage in John's Gospel which describes the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (12:16-19), because there the "Resurrection-coronation" theme is presented conspicuously in a Gospel source. Parallel passages of the Triumphal Entry may be found in Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-10, and Luke 19:29-40, but the writers of these passages do not connect the Triumphal Entry with the Resurrection per se, as John does. In fact, Mark and Luke connect the event neither with the Resurrection nor with the prophecy of Zechariah, thus failing to relate it to the Resurrection in any way. All, however, do show an interest in connecting the event with the kingship of Jesus by reporting the shouts of praises of the crowd who hailed Jesus as the "Son of David" (Matthew), "King who comes in the name of the Lord" (Luke), "King of Israel" (John), and "he who comes in the name of the Lord [to rule over?] the kingdom of our father David" (Mark).

Here, as in John 2:18-22 (which see), John adds an explanatory note concerning how the Resurrection enabled the disciples to recall and understand teachings and events that were puzzling to them at the time they were spoken or enacted (see discussion on "temple," pages 80-85). In 2:18-22, John explains an enigmatic "temple" teaching, whereas in this passage (12:16-19) he explains an "event" coupled with a prophecy in Zechariah (9:9). John explains that the disciples at first "did not understand" the reception of Jesus as "King



of Israel" on the part of the crowd at "the feast," but that when "Jesus was glorified," they remembered that "this had been written of him" (Zechariah 9:9) and "had been done to him" (12:16). John then adds another very significant note to the effect that the smaller crowd that had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead had borne this witness, and as a result this "great" crowd had gathered to hail Jesus as King because of this "sign" he had done. We observe, then, that John associates the Triumphal Entry with both the "glorification" (Resurrection) of Jesus and also with the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The point here is that John explains that the crowd recognized Jesus to be the coming king of Israel because he had raised Lazarus from the dead, and that, by implication, the same process of thinking had apparently gone on in the minds of the disciples, who, after seeing Jesus come forth from the grave, were then willing to hail him as the True King of Zion.

Such a backward-looking explanation as John gives here would have been pointless if it had not been based upon the fact that the disciples understood the Resurrection to be the coronation of the King, that is, *after* the Resurrection, and hence were finally able to understand the Triumphal Entry as a preview of the coronation. Perhaps at the time of the event the disciples thought it strange and inconsistent that Jesus should permit such a display of homage to him, especially since he had consistently shown a strong aversion to such displays, for example, when the multitude he had fed attempted to "take him by force to make him a king" (John 6:15); but when they remembered after the Resurrection that he had given them full instructions as to where and how to obtain the colt which he used to enter Jerusalem, they concluded that Jesus had either planned the event so as to provide them with a preview of his coronation, or else had set the stage so that the event might happen in keeping with the ancient prophecy of Zechariah.

When we turn our attention to the book of Acts, we see the Resurrection-coronation theme presented in its fullest manner. The writer opens his account with a reference to the Ascension (Acts 1:2) and then goes immediately back to the forty days of "appearances" after the Resurrection, during which time Jesus was "speaking of the kingdom of God" to them (Acts 1:3). Evidently Jesus wanted to be certain that they connected his Resurrection and Ascension with his corona-

tion as the Risen King, and his constant reference to the kingdom of God during these forty days left its impression on them, howbeit the wrong impression doubtlessly, for soon they were inquiring of him: "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) Probably it was at this time that they "remembered" the events of the Triumphal Entry (compare John 12:16) when they had heard the impetuous crowd hail him as "King of Israel," and so on. At any rate, it is clear that they now were thinking seriously of Jesus' kingship, although they were not yet certain as to what kind of kingship it would be. But soon Jesus ascended into heaven, and as they watched with amazement his going away from them, the angels brought them back to reality by rebuking them gently: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). This verse has often been connected with the Second Coming interpreted strictly in terms of time, or in terms of an Event far in the future; but it seems most reasonable, in this context at least, to think of Jesus' statement of his return as a reference to his return in the Holy Spirit, while they tarried in Jerusalem until they received the "promise" of the Father to be "clothed with power from on high," which had been announced at the very beginning of his ministry by John the Baptist: "I have baptized you with water; but he [Christ] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8; Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5). We shall deal more fully with the baptizing of the Holy Spirit in another chapter which follows.

At Pentecost, then, according to the "promise" of the Father, the Power of the Holy Spirit fell upon the Church and a mighty awakening took place among the disciples. With zeal and with utter disregard for their safety they proclaimed the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection of Jesus the Christ as an Act of God for the establishing of the kingdom of God, and explained the Holy Spirit's coming upon them at Pentecost as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel (Acts 2:1-36):

'And in the last days it shall be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams;



yea, and on my menservants and  
my maidservants in those days  
I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.  
And I will show wonders in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth beneath,  
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;  
the sun shall be turned into darkness  
and the moon into blood,  
before the day of the Lord comes,  
the great and manifest day.  
And it shall be that whoever calls  
on the name of the Lord shall  
be saved.'

(Acts 2:17-21)

But there is more meaning in the above passage beyond its reference to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh. Evidently Peter probably wanted also to connect the "apocalyptic" section of this prophecy (verses 19-21) with the "apocalyptic" discourse of Jesus (Matthew 24; 25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-36), for there he remembered that Jesus had used similar language ("wonders in heaven"—stars falling, the sun's being darkened, the moon's being turned into blood; and "signs on the earth beneath"—lesson of the fig tree, the flood in Noah's day, the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem, and so on) in describing the "signs" of the coming of the Son of man (Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27, 28). Probably Jesus, Peter reasoned, had been thinking of the same passage in Joel when he was speaking of the coming of the Son of man in great power and glory. And now Peter understands the coming of the Son of man into his kingdom and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit as one Event, described in the vivid imagery of apocalyptic language. And the Sign of all signs of this coming Peter now understood to be nothing less than the Resurrection of Christ from the dead.

Listen to a portion of his short but direct sermon to the "men of Israel": "Men of Israel, *hear these words*: Jesus of Nazareth, a man [Incarnation] attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed [Cross] by the hands of

lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him [Psalm 16:8-11],

'I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;  
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
moreover my [dying] flesh will dwell in hope.  
For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades,  
nor let thy Holy One see corruption.  
Thou hast made known to me the ways of life;  
thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence.'  
(italics added)

Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all [here and now] are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he [Christ apparently] has poured out this which you see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens [as did the Son of man]; but he himself says,

'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand,  
till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet.'

Let all the house of Israel [kingly line?] therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (italics added) (Acts 2:22-36).

This is a remarkable sermon because of what it stresses and because of what it tells us about the early proclamation (*kerugma*) of the Church, and there are similar passages throughout the Acts and Epistles which proclaim the Resurrection-coronation Event as the fulfillment of ancient divine promises and prophecies, for example, Acts 3:12-26; 4:5-12, 25-30; 5:29-32; 7:51-56, 59, 60; 17:2, 3; 26:6-8; 28:20, 23, 31; Romans 1:4-6; 14:9; Ephesians 1:3, 20; 2:6; 4:10; 5:5; Hebrews 12:2; Revelation 11:15; 12:10; 22:1, 3, and so on. It will not



be necessary to deal with each of these passages, because to deal with one is to deal essentially with all. They have been listed simply in order to emphasize the great weight the early preachers and writers put upon this theme. For our purpose it will be necessary to deal in some detail only with the *first* sermon recorded in Acts which doubtless sets the pattern of thought for the development of ideas which follows.

With profound conviction, Peter, who had now been "baptized with the Holy Spirit and with *fire*" (*italics added*) (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16), stresses the importance of his earth-shaking and resistance-shattering message on the "day of the Lord" (Acts 2:19, 20) by the command: "Men of Israel, *hear these words!*" He has a message to proclaim and he is sure of it! He then proceeds to outline, step by step, the ministry, death, and Resurrection of the Christ. He recognizes the importance of the Incarnation and the Cross, but he also knows that the *climax* of God's work in Christ was reached in the Resurrection-coronation Event (Acts 2:22-24). This is the Event that makes all the difference! He follows this outline with a psalm of David (16:8-11) which was intended to impress upon his hearers that David in his day knew the Eternal Lord Christ, the Holy One of Israel, as a Personal Presence, and likewise "was full of gladness" and "rejoiced" in his Presence. This is a strong assertion on Peter's part of the "pre-existence" of the Christ.

Finally, Peter comes to the main point of his sermon where he compares King David with Jesus, the King-Messiah. He reminds his hearers that the tomb of David is still with them and that his remains are still in it, but that (by implication) Jesus' tomb is not with them, that is, it is empty. He tells them that David, on the basis of God's promise of the re-establishment of his throne, prophetically "foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ" in his psalm. This psalm, Peter implies, is fulfilled in their presence, and they are all witnesses to these things. The only conclusion we can draw from all of this is that Peter and the others with him had seen a new vision, they had experienced another Transfiguration with Christ, and they were now again on a spiritual mountaintop ready with courage and gladness to go forth to witness in the name of the King, because the Resurrection for them had truly constituted his coronation as King of kings and Lord of lords.

### **The Ever-Present Christ**

In the preceding section our main concern was to show that the Resurrection of Christ was looked upon by his followers as the coronation of the King. There we did have something to say about the believer's awareness of the Living Christ in his life and within history, but our main concern there was to show that Jesus, through the Resurrection, was installed King over all the universe. There we left him—on his Throne. But to leave Christ on his Throne emphasizes his transcendence, his majesty, his distance (in heaven), his unapproachableness, and tends to obscure the fact of his Living Presence in the lives and affairs of men. This has actually happened time and again. So distant is Christ to some that they must go through many intermediaries before they can come into his Presence. To many he is a magnificent Monarch hidden away in his heavenly castle and seen only through his heavenly courtiers and earthly consuls. He, to many, is like the Christ whom Dante at last beheld, after a long and arduous journey through the Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise. Many were needed to escort him to the dwelling place of the Christ in the "light unapproachable." Christ, for Dante and for many others, is One so exalted, so high and lifted up, that he must be sought and found, if one is to have an audience with him.

Although the New Testament strongly emphasizes the Exaltation of Christ after his Humiliation and pictures him on his Throne at the "right hand of God on high," it does not fail, on the other hand, to stress just as strongly the nearness and approachableness of the King who comes to men in the Holy Spirit, who does not hide himself away in the ivory towers and palaces of heaven to be sought out by those who are in need of him. Incidentally, the word picture which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews paints of Christ as the Great High Priest officiating in heaven is also in danger of being interpreted too literally or too one-sidedly so as to perceive Christ officiating in the heavenly temple and to fail to see him functioning in the earthly temples of men. This vision of Christ as the transcendent Christ-Priest is a vision which many have of him even to this day.

We have already observed that after the Resurrection the writers of the New Testament became keenly aware of the Ever-Present Christ. The New Testament abounds in passages indicating this



awareness. So sensitive were they of the King's Presence that they readily saw clues of his Presence in the lives of Old Testament authors, such as in David's life, for example. We have already dealt with the passage we have in mind (Psalm 16:8-11) which Peter quotes in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. In this sermon, we repeat, David's fellowship with the Lord (the Holy One of Israel) was apparently used by Peter to prove that the Christ was present to David too. Some, however, may argue against this idea and say that David's "Lord" in this passage was God Himself enabling David to see that the Holy One of Israel would not see corruption. But at this point we need to be reminded of the question Jesus put to the Pharisees concerning whose son the Christ was (Matthew 22:41-46). When they replied that he was David's son, he asked them how it was that David called him "Lord." The Pharisees were silenced at this. Obviously here the term "Lord" is used of the Messiah. This, then, makes it at least possible for us to interpret Psalm 16:8-11 as an example of Peter seeing the Ever-Present Christ active in David's day.

To cite another example of Peter seeing clues of Christ's Presence among the Old Testament prophets, we turn to I Peter 1:10, 11. The writer is concerned to bolster the faith and courage of those "exiles of the dispersion" who dwell far away from the land of Judah where Jesus lived and died and rose again, and who may soon have to "suffer various trials" (I Peter 1:6). They are troubled over the prospect of persecution and trials, but Peter assures them that the Spirit of Christ will give them power and comfort in their sufferings. But seemingly they are not confident that Christ will be with them. With these words he seeks to reassure them: "*Without having seen him you love him; though you do not see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls. The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ [Pneuma Christou] within them, when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory*" (italics added) (I Peter 1:8-11). Peter's argument in substance to them was this: If the Spirit of Christ was with those who prophesied of these events, surely the Spirit of Christ is with those who live after the events of the Cross and the Resurrection.

The Resurrection-coronation theme in the book of Acts has already been discussed at length. But even though the doctrine of the Reigning Christ is so strongly presented in Acts, we must not overlook the fact that the doctrine of the Eternally Present Christ is just as strongly presented. Samuel G. Craig states this very clearly in his interesting suggestion concerning Luke's intention in writing Acts. He writes: "Luke, for instance, in the preface to the book of Acts, tells us that in his former treatise, i.e., his Gospel, he had dealt with the things that 'Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day in which He was received up,' thus implying that in this second treatise he intended to deal with the things that Jesus continued to do and teach after His ascension. In fact, if Luke himself had named the book it is probable that he would have called it *The Acts of the Risen Lord* rather than *The Acts of the Apostles*, inasmuch as he ever looks upon the Apostles as but the instruments through whom Jesus continued to carry on His work in the world. Moreover, Luke's viewpoint is shared by all the writers of the New Testament. All its books were written subsequent to Christ's death and by men who were firmly convinced that He was a living reality."<sup>3</sup>

The Christ who reigns in heaven, therefore, is also the Christ who reigns on the earth. In Acts the story of Saul's (Paul's) conversion is told. Saul the Pharisee is on his way to Damascus to arrest those of "the Way" (Christians). On the way to Damascus Saul is overcome by a "light from heaven" that "flashed" around him, and he hears the voice of Jesus giving him certain instructions about his future activities as a "chosen instrument" to carry the "name" of the Lord "before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel" (Acts 9:1-16). The conversion experience of Saul bears striking similarity to the Transfiguration experience of the disciples, Peter, James, and John. They too were dazzled by a great light and heard a voice from heaven. In their case the voice was that of God, but in Saul's case it was the voice of Jesus, the Risen King, who overpowered him with his glory and gave him commands to carry out. The Jesus who met Saul in this experience was not the meek and mild Jesus of the Gospels, but rather the One whose glory invades the earth and overpowers and commissions Saul

<sup>3</sup> Samuel G. Craig, *Jesus of Yesterday and Today* (Philadelphia, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1956), p. 61. Used by permission.



to go to the Gentiles and to the sons of Israel. The Christ is on his Throne and his Throne is everywhere.

This encounter with Christ so impressed Saul that he and the whole course of his life were changed from that moment on. Evidently he never tired of relating this "heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19) to others as an explanation of the radical change in his life (compare Acts 22:3-16; 26:2-23). It was because of this encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus that Paul became convinced that the Resurrection was not only a fact but the most significant fact of all. Paul's conversion was the result of an encounter with the Risen Christ. The only Christ he knew was the Risen Christ who met him there on the road and who was with him at all times during his long and eventful ministry (compare Acts 16:7; 23:11, and so on). From that moment on Paul was the servant of the "Lord Jesus Christ." Paul usually put these three terms together in this order of arrangement or in other combinations.

There is great significance in this combination of terms as Paul used them. With the term "Lord" (*Kurios*) Paul evidently connected Jesus the Christ with the Lord of the Old Testament or God Himself (compare Philippians 2:11; Romans 1:4, and so on). In other words the Lord God Himself had acted and was acting in Jesus the Christ (II Corinthians 5:19). This interpretation is possible because the Greek term for Lord used by Paul in these titles was the term *Kurios* found in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, as a translation of the name of God, *Yahweh* (*Jehovah*), and Paul used the Septuagint most of the time, as his quotations from the Old Testament will show. With the second term, "Jesus" (*Iēsous*), Paul no doubt referred to the Incarnation or the historical manifestation of God in Jesus the Christ, although Paul probably had not known the Jesus of the flesh. By the third term, "Christ" (*Christos*), Paul meant the Risen, Reigning Christ, who was now on the Throne of his glory and now working in the midst of his followers. With these three titles Paul described the Total Event of God's working in human affairs. And all of Paul's teachings concerning reconciliation and salvation are to be understood in terms of this Total Event. To this subject we shall return in the last chapter of this essay.

Any discussion of the Ever-Present Christ would have to include a discussion of Paul's "in Christ" phrase. However, at this point in our discussion we shall hardly do more than mention it, because we

shall deal at length with it in the following chapters of this book. In fact, the remainder of the discussion will have to do primarily with the working of the Ever-Present Christ, the Word and the Spirit, in the Church to reconcile men to God and save them from their sins. We mention Paul's "in Christ" phrase at this point because of its relationship to the idea of the Ever-Present Christ and because of its contrast with the idea of the Reigning, Transcendent Christ. We are simply illustrating again, however, that the Christ "above" is also the Christ "among" and the Christ "within" at the same time. And as we shall see, for Paul, Christ in him, "the hope of glory" was the saving Power of God at work, giving life, and hope, and certainty and joy to him who believes.

Paul Tillich has written illuminatingly on this point: "Paul points to that which gives us such a certainty: It is not an historical report, but it is the participation in Christ, in whom we are established, as he says, who has given us the guarantee of His Spirit in our hearts. We can stand the Yes and No of life and truth because we participate in the Yes beyond Yes and No, because we are in it, as it is in us. We are participants of His resurrection; therefore, we can say the ultimate Yes, the Amen beyond our Yes and our No."<sup>4</sup> On this same eschatological-existential theme Rudolf Bultmann puts us much in his debt for his recent masterful and lucid treatment of the Christian view of history in the Gifford Lectures delivered in 1955, and now published. In this connection he cites Erich Frank: ". . . to the Christians the advent of Christ was not an event in that temporal process which we mean by history today. It was an event in the history of salvation, in the realm of eternity, an eschatological moment in which rather this profane history of the world came to its end. And in an analogous way, history comes to its end in the religious experience of any Christian 'who is in Christ. . . .' For although the advent of Christ is an historical event which happened 'once' in the past, it is, at the same time, an eternal event which occurs again and again in the soul of any Christian in whose soul Christ is born, suffers, dies and is raised up to eternal life."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Tillich, *The New Being*, pp. 103, 104.

<sup>5</sup> Erich Frank, *The Role of History in Christian Thought*, cited by Rudolf Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 153. Used by permission.



We have already spoken of the eschatological-existential nature of Jesus' teachings, as reflected, for example, in the "apocalyptic" discourses recorded in Matthew (24; 25), Mark (13), and Luke (21).<sup>6</sup> Evidently the disciples of Jesus, and finally Paul and others of that post-Resurrection period characterized by high hopes, intense activity, and rapid expansion of Christianity, eventually came to understand not only the eschatological-existential character of Jesus' teaching, but also came to understand (in the light of the Resurrection) that Eternity had really broken into time and that "in Christ" the believer participates in the New Being which is breaking into human history to supply the Yes, the Amen beyond our Yes and our No. When one comes to see the reconciling and saving work of God "in Christ" to be the same as the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in men, he is in a position to understand the meaning of the eschatological-existential nature of God's working in history from beyond history. In our closing discussion in Chapter X we shall attempt to elucidate this theme further, particularly as it relates to the transformation God works in the believer, thus turning his opposition to God (see Chapter I) into participation in God, that is, turning his "epistemological" opposition into "ontological" participation.

<sup>6</sup> See *supra*, pp. 103-109.

## CHAPTER VII

# SAVED BY THE WORD

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before *him* no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of *him* with whom we have to do.

Since then we have a great *high priest* who has passed through the heavens, *Jesus, the Son of God*, let us hold fast our confession [*italics added*].<sup>1</sup>

Break Thou the bread of life,  
Dear Lord, to me,  
As Thou didst break the loaves  
Beside the sea;  
*Beyond the sacred page*  
I seek Thee, Lord;  
My spirit pants for Thee,  
O *living Word*.

O send *Thy Spirit*, Lord,  
Now unto me,  
That He may touch mine eyes,  
And make me see:  
Show me the *truth concealed*  
*Within Thy Word*,  
And in *Thy Book* revealed  
I see the Lord [*italics added*].<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 4:12-14.

<sup>2</sup> Mary A. Lathbury, "Break Thou the Bread of Life."



### Prefatory Note

The history of Christian theology reveals that at least three elemental and far-reaching distortions of the Christian faith have occurred in the course of time. The first involved the identification of the Word of God with human wisdom and words, the second the identification of Christ with Jesus, and the third the identification of the Church with history. The effects of these distortions have been crippling to the progress of the Christian movement and even disastrous at times, resulting in bitter recriminations and fratricidal conflicts. Surely, when God sees His children walking not in the truth and engaging in such personality- and fellowship-destroying struggles, His "soul is very sorrowful" like unto that of the Man of Galilee in the garden of Gethsemane. These distortions may be said to have grown out of one basic desire—the desire of men to bring under *their* control the reconciling and saving works of God. The history of Christianity shows that men have plotted and struggled to control and dispense the "means of grace" within the course of history. Many Christians have forgotten that God alone reconciles and saves through His own divinely appointed "channels"—Word, Christ, Spirit, and Church, and that men may be witnesses of His gracious works but never anything more than that. This is not to say that God does not use human agency in His divine works, but it is to say that at no point is human agency indispensable. God can and does speak to persons as individuals apart from the help of other agents. No man can bind God's Word to himself or to anything for that matter, for the Word of God cannot be fettered (compare II Timothy 2:9).

It must be said at this point that these three basic distortions are not to be presented and discussed in terms of their historical chronology. The main concern here is to *illustrate* how these distortions have resulted in misinterpretations of the reconciling and saving works of God, and then to show by the exegesis of certain passages in the New Testament that the Resurrection of Christ provides the exegetical polemic for the correction of these distortions. Some attention will be given to historical matters, but only insofar as this is necessary for our purpose here.

### The First Distortion

Very early in the Hebrew and Christian traditions the implicit identification of the Word of God with human wisdom and words took place. It was quite natural for men to think that when God communicated with them He would do so in terms of human reason and language. Thus religious oracles emerged which men came to treasure as sacred writings containing divine laws, and these directions for life and worship were copied and recopied and passed on from generation to generation. Each generation was charged with the responsibility of keeping these holy scriptures from error and mistreatment by meticulous copying of every word and mark. In time the religious cult or nation would declare their holy scriptures complete and an official statement to this effect drawn up. In this way the canon of scripture was closed and fixed for all time. This is what eventually happened in the case of the Old Testament Scriptures, so that the orthodox Jew to this day knows exactly how many authoritative religious writings are available to man. All other books to him are pagan and of no worth so far as the Word of God to men is concerned. To him the Word of God is to be found *only* in the canon of Old Testament Scriptures designated as authoritative by those religious authorities who long ago recognized these books, and these alone, as valid records of God's saving and judging Acts and Word.

The development we have described briefly above we shall label "biblicism." It illustrates one form of the identification of the Word of God with human reason and language. As far as the Christian faith is concerned, this particular distortion of God's Word began to appear very early in Christian history. The early centuries of the Christian movement saw the combining of Hebrew ideas about the Old Testament Scriptures with ideas derived from the Greek mystery cults in which the prophets and seers received from the gods certain ecstatic communications transcending the reasoning processes and causing them to utter oracles that they did not understand as such. The Delphic oracles are a case in point. As a result of this blending of Greek and Hebrew ideas by the early Christians, concerning the giving of divine oracles, there arose the idea that the writers of the Hebrew-Christian



Scriptures were pens in the hand of the Holy Spirit, or, to change the metaphor, lyres in the hands of God. In due time Christians came to accept the Old and New Testaments as divinely inspired oracles given directly to the minds of the writers, therefore containing infallible divine truths and instructions for Christian morality.

With this development came a kindred development—that of the growth of tradition. The Roman Catholic Church especially makes much of the role of tradition in the Church. According to Roman Catholic theology, the traditions of the Church, declared to be dogma by the pope when he speaks *ex cathedra*, become binding, infallible interpretations of the Old and New Testaments and serve to make explicit the truths that are implicit in them. The Roman Catholic view is an almost exact counterpart of the Hebrew conception of oral traditions, as these developed through the pre-Christian ages. According to the Hebrew teachers of the Mosaic law, God gave the Torah to Moses just as it now stands written, and at the same time gave certain oral traditions that were to be handed down through the ages to serve as supporting interpretations of the law, so that the law would not suffer change. By Jesus' day the oral traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees were so elaborate and detailed that many books were required to hold them when they were finally written down. The result was the Jewish Talmud.

But in spite of the interest of the early Christian Church in the verbal nature of the Word of God, that is, as divinely inspired and authoritative truths in human language, radical biblicism did not emerge at that time owing to the rising authority of the hierarchy of the Church. Attention was thus shifted from Biblical authority to ecclesiastical authority. This development went on until the time of the Reformation. When the Reformers, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and others, began the rebellion against the authority of the Church, their followers carried this rebellion on with the result that ecclesiastical authority was finally superseded by Biblical authority. When this took place, the Protestant scholastics of the seventeenth century set Biblical authority against the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and its traditions.

It was during this post-Reformation era that the verbal theory of inspiration and the dogma of Biblical inerrancy arose in opposition to the Roman Catholic claim of inerrancy for both Bible, which was

understood to have been "dictated" by the Holy Spirit, and pope, whose pronouncements on faith and morals were considered infallible, when spoken *ex cathedra*, and therefore absolutely binding on all Roman Catholics. Since the Roman Catholics had the advantage of a long history and tradition, and since the Roman Church wielded absolute authority and power on the basis of these historical authorities (Bible and pope), the Reformers and their followers were constrained to find an external, historical authority comparable to the authorities of the Roman Church. This they found in the Bible itself. The Bible became for them, and for many who have followed them, the very Word of God in written form to be accepted without question and to be read and interpreted in the literal sense.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of this literal reading and interpretation of the Bible the Protestant movement, instead of being unified around one source of authority, became a divided communion, breaking up into many different sects and churches, each claiming the infallible support of the Bible. Each sect could find its special Biblical proof texts which provided its *raison d'être* and its program of activities. God's Word now had become a human word, a collection of revealed truths, bound between the covers of a book and subject to the control and manipulation of men. All these sects were agreed that the Bible was in fact the infallible and *ipsissima verba* of God himself, but what they failed to see at first was that they were *fallible* interpreters of this supposedly infallible book. This problem was eventually seen by the theologians, and then the injunction came that the Bible was to be read *but not interpreted*, as if this were possible!

Many Christians are coming to understand that the dogma of an infallible Bible is, in a sense, a form of idolatry. "The fundamentalist notion of an inerrant Bible is not only untenable," say two contemporary writers, "it is a form of idolatry, a kind of perversion which exalts the finite and the fallible to a place of authority belonging to God alone."<sup>4</sup> In other words, when the Bible is looked upon as the very Word of God in human language, the owner of a copy may read it, if he wishes, or put it on a table in his home as a kind of charm that will

<sup>3</sup> On "literalism" see the excellent book by Wilder, *New Testament Faith for Today*.

<sup>4</sup> John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 274.



keep evil away. Since he has the option of reading it or of not reading it, he controls the Word of God to him. The conversation becomes a one-sided conversation, or at least a conversation that is controlled on one side—man's. In principle this situation is no different from that of the act of the worshiper who stands for a little while before the silent Buddha and then departs. If God's Word to man could be reduced to a set of infallible propositions in a book, then man could read or not read, as he chose. The Word of God would therefore be bound, just as the Buddha is bound who must wait silently on the pedestal until the worshiper returns.

Another concomitant of the idea of the infallibility of external religious authorities is the effect this idea has on faith itself. Paul Tillich writes that the "concept of the 'infallibility' of a decision by a council or a bishop or a book excludes doubt as an element of faith in those who subject themselves to these authorities. . . . This faith has become static," he goes on to say, "a nonquestioning surrender not only to the ultimate, which is affirmed in the act of faith, but also to its concrete elements as formulated by the religious authorities."<sup>5</sup> Faith so understood cannot be faith. A static faith is a dead faith. Faith must be alive and open. Any wholesale surrender to infallible religious authority short of God amounts to a surrender of the faith principle or faith function and ultimately destroys the faith faculty itself.<sup>6</sup> A true faith in God is a questioning quest, while at the same time it is a true Word from the Lord, and understood in the existential moment. A true faith in God is Yes and No at the same time. A true faith "hears" the Word of the Lord rather than reads it or interprets it, or, which is worse than all, memorizes it.

"Man shall not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,"

quotes Jesus from Deuteronomy (8:3). In other words, God speaks and man hears by faith. His hearing and understanding require the interpreting role of reason, but God's Word is never equal to man's reason. God's Word is always more; it is Infinite.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 28. Used by permission.

<sup>6</sup> On the idea that faith is a "faculty" see Phillips, *New Testament Christianity*, pp. 23-42.

The type of biblicism we have been discussing up to this point implies that the Word as revelation is propositional or verbal in nature, or at least that it involves the giving of rational truth, either abstract or concrete, to men of old who wrote these truths down in books and thus preserved them for posterity. The equating of revelation with rational truth may, in a loose sense, be labeled "scholasticism." Scholasticism, so called, appeared in the early Middle Ages, first, within a Platonic or neo-Platonic philosophical tradition, and in the later Middle Ages, second, within an Aristotelian philosophical tradition. The synthesis of Christian doctrine with Greek philosophy, and with other philosophical strains as well, is what is meant by scholasticism. The Greeks being lovers of wisdom and searchers after rational truth, after the "reasons why," bequeathed to the Western world this conception of truth. To the Greeks, in the main, truth was intellectual truth discovered by the rational process of deduction and induction and found by following the "stream of consciousness" higher and higher into the realms of abstract truth, finally to lay hold upon the Truth itself, the divine Logos or Reason. The Greek conception of truth, therefore, provided the intellectual foundations for scholastic theology.

Roman Catholic theology especially displays the scholastic characteristics we have briefly described above, owing, no doubt, to its almost complete dependence upon the greatest (perhaps) scholastic of them all, Thomas Aquinas, who lived and wrote in the thirteenth century. Aquinas made it very clear that revelation was the communication of truths. According to him, there were two ways by which these divine truths came to man: (1) by the light of natural reason and (2) by special revelations from God Himself. By the light of natural reason (sometimes called natural theology or general revelation), Aquinas held, man can formulate, empirically, rational arguments to prove the existence of God and to prove the validity of other divine truths as well. On the other hand, by special revelation God revealed truths to man that man could never have discovered by the light of natural reason alone, Aquinas argued. Consequently, such doctrines as those of the Incarnation, Atonement, Trinity, and so on, were truths revealed to the prophets and to Jesus in special divine disclosures. The point to remember for our purposes here is that revelation is thus understood as the discovery (natural revelation) or com-



munication of divine truths (special revelation) to be recorded, studied, and handed on from one generation of men to another, either in written form or in the form of tradition.

When revelation is conceived in terms of communicated truths, *faith then becomes, primarily, assent to revealed doctrines*. Aquinas made it very clear that faith is rational assent to revealed truths on the authority of God (Scriptures and tradition) and on the authority of His divinely appointed custodians of the truth—the hierarchy of the Church, ruled over by the sovereign pontiff, the pope. Aquinas classified the Bible as special revelation or as a communication of divine truths to men of old. For this reason the Old and New Testaments were to be regarded as divinely inspired (dictated), hence infallible and absolutely authoritative written (verbal) revelations. One's salvation, at least in part, was dependent upon mental assent (faith) to the propositions of the Scriptures.

But faith understood as mental assent has its difficulties, as the Council of Trent (sixteenth century) recognized. John Baillie points out that this council ruled that "things divinely revealed" were "so many and so various" that all these truths should be placed under four heads to simplify them; namely, (1) the Apostles' Creed (2) the Sacraments, (3) the Ten Commandments, and (4) the Lord's Prayer, because they were too *much for the memory*. "How far we have travelled from the New Testament," he writes, "when we think of God's revelation as being of such a kind as to put a strain on the memory! It is significant also that the section of the Catechism [under consideration] . . . bears the caption, 'Since God hath withdrawn His visible presence from us, His pastors derive His Word from Scripture and from Tradition' [Preface to the Catechism, *Quaestio* xii]. Surely there is something seriously wrong in this way of putting it—in saying that God has so withdrawn Himself as to leave us with only a script and a memory!"<sup>7</sup> In all this, what has become of the New Testament doctrine of the Presence of God in human life and history through the Christ and Holy Spirit? Truly, here the idea of faith as personal encounter and commitment in trust is seriously obscured. "For the deepest difficulty felt about the equation of revelation with communi-

<sup>7</sup> John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1956), pp. 29, 30. Used by permission.

cated truths is that it offers us something less than personal encounter and personal communion. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

When revelation is thus understood as basically personal and existential, it can no longer be understood as being the "communication" of rational truths per se, but rather as "communion" with God Himself. God does not reveal truth as such to men, but reveals *Himself*. Revelation is then not understood as "something" revealed but as Someone *being revealed* or revealing Himself. Revelation so conceived is historical, personal, and existential in nature and form, but is never to be equated with any of its forms or modes of expression. Revelation is "God's speaking," to cite Karl Barth. Revelation is God's speaking in Christ the Word and in the Holy Spirit. "Only the man who knows about Jesus Christ knows anything at all about revelation."<sup>9</sup> And the "Jesus Christ" to whom Barth refers in the quotation above is not One whom we learn about, but One who *meets* us in personal and existential encounter in the moment of the crisis-commitment. This is a personal encounter with and commitment to the Living Lord Jesus Christ, that is, to God *Himself* as he comes to men in their finitude. God, then, on this understanding, has not withdrawn Himself in deistical fashion, leaving with man only the Scriptures or creeds, but rather comes to man in the Ever-Present Christ and Holy Spirit. "In contrast, the modern view [against scholasticism and since Biblical criticism has done its work] understands that the content of revelation is God *himself*, not scripture or creed or tradition. This is the heart of the matter. Revelation means, simply, *God personally present*. It is God's coming to man, his *disclosure of himself*. It is identical with his creating, redeeming, judging and sanctifying work" [*italics added*].<sup>10</sup>

What, then, are we to say concerning the nature and value of the Scriptures themselves for modern man? "What needs to be made clear," says John Marsh, "is that the Bible, as a record of events that are past, functions now, under the illumination of the Spirit, as the events once did, as the [or "an"?] appointed means by which men meet with the ever-living God. He imparts himself to us now by means of what he has done in the past, and that lifts both past and present

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Barth, cited by Fosdick, *The Living of These Days*, p. 263.

<sup>10</sup> Dillenberger and Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 274.



out of the confines of mere temporality and succession, and sets them in a vital relationship to God who dwells in eternity."<sup>11</sup> What John Marsh is saying, I take it, is that the Scriptures are to be understood "existentially," that is, within the moments of life's decisions, struggles, and so on, and under the guidance of God's Presence in the Ever-Present Christ and Holy Spirit. This approach to the *Scriptures* gives them a dynamic authority that they did not have under the scholastic approach or do not have under the radical fundamentalist approach of today. For this reason we must not speak of the Bible as *the Word of God* as such, because it is not the Word of God in this sense, that is, in the sense that it consists of infallible *revealed truths* given to men in written form. The Bible, therefore, is not to be equated with the Word of God, for to do so is to identify the Word of God with human reason and words. This is the first distortion we have been considering, and the consequences of this distortion are well known to all in terms of the broken fellowship between Christians around the world.

If the human words of the Bible are not to be identified with the Word of God, how can we depend upon the authority of the Scriptures? This is a crucial question for many, but it is a question that need never have been raised. It is the wrong question, for the Scriptures have and never did have any authority *in themselves*. Like all else in religious life and affairs, their authority comes from God Himself working in the lives of those who read the Scriptures and attempt to live by them. It is not a matter of relating oneself to the Scriptures, therefore, but basically a matter of relating oneself to God in a living faith which in turn makes the Bible come alive as the Word of God to men. The Scriptures, then are the Word of God only within the context of the faith of the living Church. The Protestant scholastics of the seventeenth century, following the lead of Calvin primarily, in revolting against the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, went too far and all but severed the authority of the Scriptures from the authority of the Church. This was and has been unfortunate, because the Bible as the Word of God has no message apart from the living context of the Church, the fellowship of believers. Church and Scriptures must go together, for in and through both the Living Lord Jesus Christ is speaking and working to reconcile all men and all

<sup>11</sup> John Marsh, *The Fulness of Time* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 9.



things unto God (compare Ephesians 1:9, 10, 20-23; 3:9, 10; Colossians 1:18-20; Hebrews 4:11-16; I Peter 1:23, and so on).<sup>12</sup>

Christians should and will always cherish the Scriptures as a historical evidence and illustration of the working of God in human life and history. In the light of what God has done in the past, the Scriptures are an indispensable record of these events. For this reason Christians cherish them and use them constantly in private devotions and study in public worship because they are constant reminders that God has come and does come into the human predicament and works reconcilingly and savingly in man's behalf. What Christians need to learn is that the Bible is to be understood not as an end in itself but as a means to an end. It always points away from itself to Another, to God Himself, just as Jesus the Man constantly pointed away from himself to the Father. The mistake of identifying the finite and fallible words and thoughts of men with the infinite and infallible Word of God Himself should be avoided from this moment on. The only infallible Guide is the Holy Spirit of God Himself. Under His leadership Christianity will once again become the dynamic movement it was when it swept over and beyond the Roman Empire in the early centuries of its greatest vitality. This vitality can be recaptured if the Gospel of the Resurrection, in all of its implications, is once again asserted in full confidence and power under the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ and (even) the Holy Spirit.

Another aspect of the first distortion, the identification of the Word of God with human reason and language, may be seen in what is usually called "rationalism." While Greek philosophy was finding expression in Christian theology in the later Middle Ages, it was also finding expression in a secular way in the Renaissance or the revival of learning in which human reason became the final arbiter. The Renaissance was a period of revolt against constituted authorities. Men no longer would accept uncritically the official dogmas of Church and state. The Renaissance spirit of revolt and inquiry sowed the seeds that were later to blossom into the revolt of the Reformation, into the democratic political philosophy, and into the scientific empiricism of the modern world. Aspects of this movement found ex-

<sup>12</sup> For an excellent treatment of the relation of the Scriptures to the Church, see George S. Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 72-95.



pression in post-Reformation centuries in the German enlightenment, French rationalistic-materialism, and English deism. No effort will be made at this point to discuss these in detail, because it is not within our purpose in this treatise. Only one of these movements, English deism, will be dealt with here.

English deism began during the latter part of the sixteenth century and continued, as a movement, until about the middle of the eighteenth century. It was an expansion of the idea of "natural theology" which Thomas Aquinas wrote about in the thirteenth century. According to the deists (in opposition to Aquinas), the natural light of reason is sufficient for one's knowledge of things temporal and divine. Aquinas had taught that certain truths (Incarnation, Trinity, and so on) came only as God revealed them to men in special encounters. The deists looked upon this special revelation first with suspicion and then rejected it altogether. To them God's Word, His revelation, was already present in the natural order, and therefore already present in man's natural reason. Special revelation, miracles, sacred scriptures and institutions were all looked upon by the deists as unessential to man's knowledge of God, because man's knowledge of God could be found in the light of natural reason. Deism thus constituted a serious threat to the Christian faith because of its radical rationalism, and the Christian churches of the time did rise up in strong opposition to the movement.

Yet deism has this in common with "biblicism" and "scholasticism": it identified human reason with the Word of God in that it conceived of God's Word as having been planted in the natural human mind at creation, leaving man to discover and develop his ideas about God and life for himself. Here the Word of God was made synonymous with the natural reason, and all special and/or personal revelations of God to men were rejected. Man needs no contact with God Himself, who was understood as utterly transcendent, as absent from the natural order, but needs only to use his intellect in keeping with the natural laws of reason. By using his powers of reason man could thus save himself and create a new heaven and a new earth. Hence deism represented a radical distortion of the Christian faith by its radical identification of God's Word with human reason.

Let us conclude this section. What has been written above should serve to illustrate that one of the major distortions of the Christian

faith is the mistake of identifying the Living Word of God with human reason and language. Only now, after modern Biblical criticism has done its constructive work, have many Christians come to recognize this ancient though very modern distortion, as is reflected in modern "fundamentalism," to be what it really is—a fettering of the Word of God. If the Word of God is not to be fettered, to what teaching or teachings in the New Testament must we go to find the corrective for this distortion? Let us now turn our attention to this task.

### **Saved by the Living Word**

In the words of the beautiful hymn on the Word of God cited at the heading of this chapter, we must look for the Word "beyond the sacred page" of Scripture and beyond every and all historical externalities. The Word which we seek we find already seeking us. The Word of God is God speaking to us in terms of reason, to be sure, but also much more than in terms of reason. The Word of God does perhaps have more to do with our understanding than with other functions of our personality (will, affections, and so on), but this is not to say that our minds alone are affected by the Word. The Word of God is speaking to us in the total range of our personality and life. God's Word is never exhausted in terms of truths revealed, but is presented in the Scriptures as the Living Personal Word which comes to men in terms of a personal encounter and in terms of a message and an event. The Word of God in the Old Testament, for example, was construed as both message and event, but message and event were seldom understood apart from God Himself. God's Word was both revelation and act, or better, a revealing act. According to the central message of the Old Testament, God is what He does and does what He is. His message was not a revealed system of truth given in isolation from historical events, but rather a message to be understood in the light of these historical events. The Hebrews did not sever the Word from history in any radical fashion, although there are signs of this severance in places. We find a different picture when we consider the time of Christ, for, as we have seen, the Scribes and Pharisees had all but identified the Word of God with their ancient writings and tradi-



tions. But we are not to be concerned further with this matter, for we have already dealt sufficiently with it for our purpose.

The Gospel of John opens with the astounding declaration: "... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we beheld his glory, glory as the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14). Here is where the Christian must take his stand concerning the Word—that the Word became flesh, that is, became a Person. On the Word as Person, Paul Tillich writes: "The Word appears as a person and only secondarily in the words of a person. The Word, the principle of the divine self-manifestation, appearing as a person, is the fulfilment of biblical personalism. It means that God is so personal that we see what he is only in a personal life. God can become man, because man is person and because God is personal."<sup>13</sup>

It is not to our purpose to discuss how Tillich uses the terms "person" and "personal" in his theology, for that would take us far afield. What is clear in this passage from Tillich's writings is that the Word of God is personal in nature, that is, it must come to man within the range of his personal experience. Now perhaps Tillich would balk at the calling the Word of God a Person, and rightly so, I think. Even in Jesus the Word did not become a *human* person. Jesus was a man and as a man he could not have been the Word. John makes it clear that the Word was "in the beginning . . . with God" and that the Word "was God." The Word became flesh, that is, *came to be* flesh for a season in order to enter decisively and supremely into human history. But the Word was never merely Jesus, but rather Jesus *the Christ*. So what we find in John's Gospel is the teaching that the Word appears as a unique personal event. In Jesus God came as close to man as it is possible for Him to come on the plane of time and space and history. *Perhaps* this is what Jesus meant in part when he spoke about the Kingdom of heaven as being "near at hand" or "in their midst."

But if God's Word as speech and action came as close to man as possible on the plane of history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, how is man *himself* to hear and be cleansed by the Word. How can men *today* come near to the Word in Jesus. The answer is to be found,

<sup>13</sup> Paul Tillich, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 38. Reprinted by permission. Copyright 1955 by The University of Chicago Press.

it seems to me, in the New Testament teaching of the Resurrection of Christ. The Word as *Jesus* no longer exists, but *Christ* the Word is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden . . ." (Hebrews 4:12, 13). Man does not come near to the Word, but rather the Word comes near to man, even *into* man by the Holy Spirit. The identification of the Word with the Holy Spirit will occupy our attention in the next chapter of this essay; therefore, we need not now trace this idea further (compare Ephesians 6:17).

The Reformers Luther and Calvin made much of the Word as the "living voice of the evangelists" (*viva vox evangelii*). Luther, more so than Calvin, seemed reluctant to equate the Living Word of God with the words of the Scriptures. And because he did so hesitate, he naturally was quicker to associate the "Living" Word with the "living" voice of the evangelist. This is what he did. To him the Scriptures were the "cradle" of the Christ, the Word. To him also the living evangelist was the "instrument" through whom the Living Word was being spoken.

In this way, and in this sense, we may speak of the Word as becoming flesh even in man's case. The Word of God is to become "flesh" in man too. This is not to say that the Word becomes a *man* any more than to say that the Word became Jesus of Nazareth, but it is to say that the Living Word does speak to and in and through those whose lives are open to Him. And this Living Word of God is "realized" in the believing man by the Holy Spirit of God. Nathan M. Pusey, President of Harvard University, implied as much in an address given at the dedication of the Robert E. Speer Library at Princeton Theological Seminary. He spoke of ministers as those who are challenged to study the "great historical reasoning of God with men and are led to participate in it."<sup>14</sup> This is an excellent way to put it. God has been "reasoning" with men ever since men came to have a capacity for the knowledge of God. But this reasoning of God with men is more than an intellectual conversation between God and man. It is, rather, a "participation" in the Word, as President Pusey says. To participate in the Word of God is to "hear" it and to "live in it." The

<sup>14</sup> Nathan M. Pusey, "For a Learned Ministry," address given on Nov. 4, 1957, reprint from the *Presbyterian Outlook*.



Word must become "realized" in man if the Word is to speak to him and through him.

Several passages in the New Testament support this line of thought. Jesus, for example, made it explicit that man "shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Jesus claimed that God was speaking in him, but he did not at any time imply that God's speaking was limited to himself. In fact he asserted very positively the opposite view. For example, when Peter confessed Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God," Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:16, 17). That is to say, Jesus was apprising Peter that his profound insight and confession had been made because of the revealing Work (Word) of God Himself. Jesus also was implying that Peter's decision was not made purely on the basis of "flesh and blood" evidence, neither on that connected with the man, Jesus of Nazareth, nor on any strictly historical thing or event. Jesus' statement to Peter should forever prevent us Christians from identifying the Word of God with any particular person, event, thing, or place. God's Word surely operates in relation to and in conjunction with persons, events, places, and things; but God's Word is never to be identified with any of them as such. The Word of God is the Word of God, no more, no less.

Jesus is reported to have said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Mark 13:31). Some would relate this saying to the Scriptures themselves, but there is certainly no justification for this. Some will say that Jesus was referring to his teachings as such. But this view must also be rejected, because, as the words were spoken, they passed away into the air never to be reclaimed again precisely as they were spoken. What could Jesus have meant by this statement, then? It would seem that such a claim must be understood in the light of the Living Word of God being expressed at that moment in Jesus. Jesus knew that many of his words would soon be forgotten or garbled (compare John 21:20-23); therefore, we conclude that he could not have been referring to his words as lasting "forever." Consequently, we must understand the eternal nature of his words to lie in another dimension; namely, in the Eternal Word of God ever entering and ever spanning the course of human history. Jesus could

talk thus about his particular, historical words because he evidently thought of God's Word as existential, as neither here nor there, as neither past nor future, but as a Living Word ever proceeding out of the mouth of God, that is, as the Eternally Present Word now being expressed in and through himself, the Man of Galilee.

One is not to conclude from the above discussion that the words of Jesus are to be considered as unimportant. What Jesus said is important to us today precisely because he said it long ago, for what he said long ago is still being said in substance to those of us who live today. And, moreover, if it were not for the Resurrection of Christ and for the great emphasis the New Testament puts upon the working of the Risen Christ and Holy Spirit, who is our Teacher and Guide into all truth, we would not be in a position to understand that what Jesus said is in substance what we may now hear from God (compare John 14:25, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:12-15, and so on). Without the ontic and noetic priority of the Word of God (Karl Barth), as so understood here, we truly would have no way of knowing or experiencing the revealing and saving Word of God in our lives.

The saving power of the Word of God has been mentioned several times already in this study. There are some important passages in the New Testament which have a bearing on this subject. In Acts (10; 11) the ministry of Peter to Cornelius, the Roman centurion, is related. Cornelius, "a devout man who feared God . . . and prayed constantly to God" (10:1, 2) and whose prayers and alms had "ascended as a memorial before God" (10:4), sent for Peter in order that he might hear from him what had been "commanded by the Lord" (10:33). Peter went to the home of Cornelius with great hesitation and reluctance, but when he arrived he found Cornelius already believing but seeking more knowledge concerning "the Lord." Peter forthwith proclaimed the Gospel to him, and closed his message with these significant words: "And he [the Risen Lord] commanded us to preach to the people [compare Matthew 28:18-20], and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:42, 43). Here Peter makes it plain that his role as preacher was simply one of testifying or witnessing. This was what he was now doing in Cornelius' home. He further disclosed to Cornelius that the Risen Lord is he who



judges the living (Cornelius) and the dead and he whose Presence ("through his name") made it possible for Cornelius to believe, even though he did not possess knowledge about the events of the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection.

To state it differently, Cornelius, the devout man whose prayers had already been answered, had become a believer through the working of the Risen Christ, the Word of God, in his life *before* Peter had come to his home. That is to say, Cornelius had found forgiveness of sins through or by the Risen Lord ("in him") *before* Peter had brought the historical message to him. This is why Peter spoke with open-mouthed amazement: "Truly I perceive [am beginning to see] that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (10:34, 35). Cornelius had *already* been accepted by God, for how can it be reasonably supposed that this devout man's prayers had not been heard by the Living God *until after* reluctant Peter had found time to tell this man the good news of God's self-disclosure in Jesus the Christ. The Word of God is not fettered. Peter discovered this truth in this experience.

But another amazing experience was to be Peter's. *While he was still speaking* the Holy Spirit fell "even" upon these Gentiles. This was amazing to Peter and to his Jewish "witnesses" not only because the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles but also because the Holy Spirit had fallen upon them *before* Peter had delivered his message in its entirety. This indicated to Peter and to his friends that *what* he was saying was not the primary consideration, but rather *that* he was saying it. It was the "living voice of the evangelist" and the "hearing in faith" that constituted the conditions for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them. In other words, the Holy Spirit came upon them because of the constellation of events at this moment and not merely because Peter was delivering a message. Peter's message, therefore, became the Word of Saving Power to Cornelius because the Living Word of God, the Risen Christ, was on hand to send the Holy Spirit upon them.

Peter's experience in the home of Cornelius should have significant implications for all Christians with regard to their understanding of the nature and techniques of missionary activities. Peter was a missionary in this experience, and an important task it was too. But Peter found himself to be the recipient as well as the giver in this situation.

He learned that God was there before he was and that the Risen Christ had already found entrance into the heart of this devout centurion before he testified in his behalf. That many Christians have not yet learned this lesson is indicated in the following lines from a Christian hymn:

Into the tent where a gipsy boy lay,  
Dying alone at the close of the day,  
News of salvation we carried, said he:  
"Nobody ever told it to me!"

This hymn, like many others, assumes that the gipsy boy certainly would have been lost if the missionary had not spoken the message to him. He is described as "dying alone" at the close of the day. Perhaps he was "alone" as far as human friends were concerned, but he was *not* alone so far as God is concerned. Must God wait until the missionary enters the tent? Must God wait until the missionary crosses the sea? To ask such questions is to know the answer, especially in the light of Peter's experience in the home of Cornelius.

Perhaps we Christians need to restudy the whole matter of missions. Can it be that we consider our message indispensable? Can it be that we think that we have the Word of God in our possession? Can it be that we want *credit* for the *number* of "heathen" souls we save rather than being content to witness and to leave the counting and the saving in God's hands? These are serious questions we need to be asking and answering. Yet, perhaps many will resent such questions because they seem to take the missionary program out of the hands of men. But this is precisely the problem we face. The missionary program is *not* man's. It is God's; and if God cannot reach our neighbors with the Living Word, then no amount of missionary effort or machinery will accomplish the task. If God cannot cross the ocean, then there is no need for the missionary to cross it.

"You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God," writes a New Testament author (I Peter 1:23). Earlier he had written: "... we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed



in the last time" (1:3-5). There can be no doubt, it seems to me, that the writer sees the Risen Christ as the Living and Abiding Word that accomplished and accomplishes their salvation which is in progress but not yet fully realized (1:5). And even though the "word of the Lord" which "abides for ever" was spoken with reference to the words preached to them (1:25), it is clear that the writer does not identify the word preached with the "living and abiding" Word of God, because no human words abide "for ever." The Living Word that regenerates them and saves them is none other than the Risen Christ, the same Lord Jesus Christ who saved Cornelius *before* Peter arrived at his home (compare also in this connection, Romans 8:9-11).

The New Testament, as we know it, closes with the book of Revelation. In this highly symbolical book the Word of God is featured in a variety of ways (compare 1:1, 2, 10-16; 2:12, 16; 5:6; 12:10, 11, and so on). In fact the book might be called the "apocalypse of the Living Word," for in it the Living and Working Word of God is described in majestic power and glory. For example, near the end of the book there appears a most significant passage. Here the Word is pictured as coming down from heaven on a white horse, the symbol of victory, to do battle against the nations and to overcome them and rule them with a rod of iron (authority). He is accompanied by the "armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure," who also ride on white horses of victory. A "sharp sword" issues "from his mouth" with which to smite the nations. The battle is terrible, but the Word conquers the kings, the captains, the mighty men, the beast, and the false prophet, and all alike are thrown into the "lake of fire that burns with brimstone" (19:11-21).

Some, perhaps most, Christians understand this to be a picture of the *last battle* when the Lord will return *in a single event in time* to destroy his enemies, save the believers, and set up his kingdom on earth. But such an interpretation is farfetched and grossly materialistic in the light of the total New Testament teaching. Rather, one should note that the victorious Word of God rides with a sword *issuing out of his mouth* and not with a sword in his hand. The obvious meaning is that the sword represents the proclamation of the Gospel, and the fact that it issues out of the mouth of the Word on the white horse indicates that it symbolizes the source of the power in the preached word to be the Living Word of God which will never taste

defeat. The note of victory is strong in this passage. The preached word *will be victorious* because it issues out of the mouth of the True and Faithful Word who comes down from heaven, from God. The Word will save by overcoming all opposition. The Word must destroy rebellion and pride before the saving power of the Word can have its effect.

This, then, is the picture we see in the closing verses of our New Testament. The Word of God pictured here is the very same One who said, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Revelation 1:17, 18). He is the Risen Lord and Living Word who comes in judgment and power upon the earth in order to save men from destruction and to lead them into the Holy City, the New Heavens and the New Earth, wherein dwells God and the Lamb on thrones, and whose twelve gates are never closed by day or by night and into which all may enter who hear and accept the invitation: "Come" (compare Revelation 21; 22). To put it another way, he is Christ the Living Word, the Two-Edged Sword of judgment and grace, who comes upon men and operates within them so that they by faith and love may find in him One who sympathizes with them and helps them in all their weaknesses and who conducts them to the throne of grace where they may find forgiveness and the life everlasting (compare Hebrews 4:12-16).



## CHAPTER VIII

# SAVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.<sup>2</sup>

The Holy Spirit is the gift of the risen Christ to the church. This is the central New Testament message concerning the Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

### The Second Distortion

We have attempted to show in the preceding chapter that a serious distortion in Christian theology has resulted from an uncritical and unbiblical identification of the Word of God with human wisdom and words. Here we shall attempt to deal with another distortion; namely, the identification of the Christ with Jesus of Nazareth. In principle these two distortions are alike in that both fail to distinguish sufficiently between the divine and the human, the infinite and the finite. Both tend to embrace a "theology of the past," such as we have already studied in Chapters II, III, and IV. Whereas the first distortion involves an identification of the Living Word of God with human wisdom and words preserved in ancient records and handed down as infallible oracles to be read, understood, memorized, and fixed in creed, sacraments, and liturgy, the second distortion involves an

<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:8.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:11.

<sup>3</sup> Filson, *Jesus Christ the Risen Lord*, p. 163.

identification of the Living Christ-Spirit with the historical figure of Jesus who lived, taught, and died long ago in the past.

We have already discussed this rather romantic and sentimental "theology of Jesus" that has found and still finds fervent expression among Christians. Only very recently this writer was subjected to just such a romanticized version of Christian theology when he sat under the preaching of a well-known pastor whose sermons consisted of a curious mixture of romanticism, ornate verbalism, moralism, puritanism, sensationalism, topped with an overbearing egoism and vanity. The series of sermons illustrated very clearly the end product of a "theology of the past" which had become doctrinaire and dogmatic, a theology that is learned, retained in the mind, and which is expressed primarily in storybook fashion before "captive audiences." The sermons were preached "from the Word of God," that is, "from" the Scriptures, as though the Scriptures alone constitute the sum total of the Word of God in man's "possession." This was precisely the impression that this writer received as he sat under the preaching of this person whose ministry had degenerated to a verbal sideshow and whose theology and message were almost totally irrelevant to the mind and spirit and needs of men today, and of all ages, for that matter.

One views such a distortion of the Living Word of God with sadness and deep concern for the future, especially when countless student-ministers are left with the impression that this is the ideal in ministerial message and technique. One also views with alarm such a distortion of the Living Christ-Word-Spirit into the Jesus of history, especially when the Jesus of history himself is distorted into a myth, that is, into Jesus the Son of God who is conceived as a separate Person from the Father, who taught men truths to live by to be passed on in verbal tradition to others, and whose life must be "described" by the preacher in minute, "romantic" detail over and over again in order to move men to be "good" and to be staunch defenders of the "faith once for all delivered to the saints," that is, to be fiery opponents of all wicked persons who deserve only scorn and condemnation and punishment.

The fault of all this is that it is a gross caricature of the real Jesus himself. Jesus was not a traditionalist or defender of "a" faith once for all delivered to the saints. He broke traditions right and left and provided "spiritual" interpretations for his disciples when they were



disturbed, for example, over Elijah's not having come to introduce the Messiah as the book of Malachi (4:5, 6) had foretold. How could Jesus be the promised Messiah, they reasoned, if Elijah had not yet come to fulfill "literally" the words of Malachi? Jesus saw their difficulty with this passage and put their minds at ease by telling them that John the Baptist was Elijah who was to come (compare Matthew 17:9-13). Jesus doubtless did not mean that John the Baptist was a "reincarnation" of the prophet Elijah. This easy setting aside of the "word of prophecy" on Jesus' part thus illustrates very clearly that Jesus was not bound by the "letter of the text" or did not consider the letter of the text as absolutely binding. Elijah in the Spirit of prophecy had indeed come in John the Baptist and had announced the coming of the Messiah, and the same Spirit was now working in John the Baptist and in Jesus the Christ. Incidentally, this illustrates the transcendent yet immanent working of the Holy Spirit in the midst of Jesus and his disciples, for it was the Holy Spirit of God who made Elijah contemporary with the disciples in John the Baptist, just as the Holy Spirit now makes the Incarnate and Risen Christ contemporary with all believers.

At this point the writer anticipates a reaction on the part of certain types of readers. What has been said above concerning a "well-known pastor" is not intended to be an attack on the person himself. He shall remain anonymous, for his name is not essential to the argument. The writer views such a distortion of Christian theology with heaviness of heart but with hope that the "theology of the past" will eventually have its day. This of course is not to say that Christian theology should ever deny its historical rootage and character; but it is to say that Christian theology should never be permitted to become only a description of or a sentimental attachment to "Jesus," or to become set in verbal propositions which are considered true simply because they were spoken a long time ago. This is also not to say that Christian thinkers should not be concerned with what was said long ago or with what should be said today, for this writer is keenly conscious of the necessity of stating the Christian faith in terms that are both understandable and compelling. Words are our tools of thought and should be "kept sharp" and used with skill and caution when attempting to discuss orally and in written form the Gospel which is one form of the Living Word of God.

What is being attempted in this study is intended to be a restudy and restatement of the Christian faith in the light of certain teachings in the New Testament, considered to have been neglected by certain theological traditions. This book itself is an attempt to understand the "historical message" of the New Testament, for the writer does consider the New Testament teaching to be an authoritative source for the understanding of the Christian faith. The one thing that is insisted on here is the freedom from the bondage of the word. God has spoken to men of old, but He is *still* speaking to us today, and this writer considers the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament to be essential to an understanding of this speaking of God.

It would seem, then, that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit will prove to be the one corrective for the "theology of the past" we have attempted to discuss earlier in this essay. It will serve to overcome the "historical drag" of the Christian faith, yet, at the same time, help to make the Christian faith even more historical and existential in nature by making it dynamic within and relevant to our day. "Religion is like the banyan tree," says D. T. Niles. "Its branches grow skyward, but from these branches roots grow down which seek and find the earth. These roots are necessary to support the outspread of the tree, but man's religious need is to be delivered from the necessity of these roots. He needs that gospel which alone can set him free for God."<sup>4</sup> When one recognizes that the reconciling and saving Word of God is not wholly bound up with any historical event or thing as such, but rather is the Living and Eternal God Himself working existentially and particularly *in history* through the Christ-Spirit-Event, that is, the Total Event, he will then be able to see the Christian faith in its universal-particular dimensions and will avoid any bondage to event, word, or thing that would rob it of its true glory. He will see that the events and words of the past are really present in the working of the Holy Spirit.

George S. Hendry puts this line of thought in these words: ". . . the incarnation itself can be extended only as the Incarnate himself represents himself in answer to the prayer of faith which arises from the apostolic witness. The apostolic testimony provides the sacramental element which the Spirit uses to re-present Christ to men; but

<sup>4</sup> D. T. Niles, *The Preacher's Task and the Stone of Stumbling* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 62, 63. Used by permission.



it is by the Spirit, who is Lord, and not by any power inherent in the apostles or their successors, that the Christ remembered in the tradition represents himself as living Lord and Saviour."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the apostolic testimony, whether written or spoken, is the "sacramental element" or historical means by which the Christ Incarnate and Risen is re-presented to men of faith today, but the sacramental elements should never be identified with the God-Christ-Spirit Himself. D. M. Baillie, in his own inimitable way, writes thus: "If we are to work out soundly the relation of Church and sacraments to the historic incarnation, we must take seriously the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This doctrine is wholly dependent on the fact of the historic incarnation of God on earth, but it is also wholly bound up with the idea that that incarnation did not go on for ever, but came to an end, and that since then the divine Presence is with us in a new way through the Holy Spirit working in the Church through Word and sacraments."<sup>6</sup>

### The Baptism of the Spirit

That the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an important theme in the New Testament is beyond question. In the opening paragraph of the "introductory" Gospel of Mark, John the Baptist announces that Jesus will baptize the people "with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8; Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). John here clearly distinguishes between water-baptism (his baptism) and the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Jesus' baptism). When Jesus himself is baptized, the Spirit descends on him like a dove and then immediately afterward drives him into the wilderness to be tested for forty days in preparation for his ministry. Throughout the Gospels Jesus is presented as teaching and healing under the Power of the Spirit. His is a Spirit-filled and a Spirit-led life from the very beginning. Shortly before his death he devotes much teaching to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit to prepare his disciples for his coming death. He tells them that when he goes away from them the Holy Spirit, the Counselor (*Paraklētos*), will come to take his place and lead them into a deeper understanding of the Gospel and give them strength and courage to withstand the trials

<sup>5</sup> Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*, p. 71.

<sup>6</sup> D. M. Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments*, p. 65.

and persecutions that are to come upon them (compare John 14:16, 17, 25, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:7-15). After his crucifixion Jesus appears to his disciples and breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). And shortly before the Ascension he charges them to wait in Jerusalem until the Power from on High (the Holy Spirit-Counselor) comes upon them. This they do, and the Spirit comes upon them in great power and glory on the day of Pentecost. From that day the Church took on new life and spread rapidly throughout the world, preaching Jesus the crucified and Risen Lord.

The book of Acts, significantly enough, likewise opens with a reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1:5). Evidently the idea of baptism of the Holy Spirit was closely connected in the minds of these early Christians with the marvelous experience on the day of Pentecost when language barriers were overcome and the universal work of the Holy Spirit was implied and the universal scope of the Church was indicated (compare Acts 2:1-21). But the idea of the baptism of the Holy Spirit goes beyond any references to a historical event as such. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is also described as a falling of the Holy Spirit upon individuals who by faith seek God's saving grace. For example, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius, the Gentile centurion, and upon all who were hearing Peter preach in the centurion's home, and following the Spirit-baptism all the believers submitted themselves to water-baptism (Acts 10:44-48; compare 19:1-7, and so on).

Paul likewise uses the idea of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In writing to the Corinthians he points out to them that "by one Spirit" they were "all baptized into one body" (the Church). Here the baptism of the Spirit is related to the Church, and it is made clear that one enters the Fellowship as a result of the baptism of the Spirit. Incidentally, there is no hint here, or elsewhere in the New Testament for that matter, that Paul thought of water-baptism as such as being a prerequisite to membership in the Church. Many Christian groups still regard water-baptism as prerequisite to Church membership, but it is almost certain that the New Testament Christians did not regard water-baptism itself as being a rite that must be submitted to before one may "enter" the Church. Rather, it seems that the overwhelming evidence of the New Testament points toward Spirit-baptism as the one true ground for admission into the Fellowship, the Body of



Christ which is the Church. Water-baptism has its importance and significance, but it cannot be regarded as the "door" into the Church. The only "door" the New Testament knows is Christ the Lord who baptizes believers into his Body by the Holy Spirit.

"To understand the role of the Spirit of God in the life and thought of the Apostolic Age," writes Filson, "we must think in post-resurrection terms. . . . It was as a sequel to the Resurrection that they [the disciples] received the Holy Spirit, and they thought of the Spirit in the light of that event."<sup>7</sup> That is to say, they thought of the Living Risen Lord as still in their midst in the working of the Holy Spirit. It became their conviction that Jesus' work had not ended with his death, but had actually just begun in the Resurrection and Return of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Spirit. The identification of the Risen Lord with the Holy Spirit is expressed in a variety of ways in the New Testament. We have already noted that the Spirit is presented under the metaphor of "sword" in Ephesians (6:17) and thereby identified with the Word of God, and that in Hebrews (4:12) the metaphor is used with reference to the Living Word, Christ the Great High Priest. In this way the Holy Spirit is presented as the Word of God, that is, as the Living Lord still active among men delivering God's Word of reconciliation and salvation to them. We have also already pointed out the passage in I Peter (1:11) where the Spirit of Christ is said to have been active among the Old Testament prophets enabling them to prophesy concerning the grace that was to come as a result of Christ's sufferings and subsequent glory (Resurrection, Coronation, Kingship). "It was revealed to them [by the Spirit-Word]," Peter writes, "that they were serving not themselves but you [Christians], in the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you *through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven*, things into which angels long to look" (italics added) (I Peter 1:12). Peter's perspective here is cosmic. He sees the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit as one Spirit revealing the Living and Abiding Word (1:23-25) to men of faith who are sharing in the salvation "ready to be revealed in the last time" (1:5). In other words, the historical events of the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of Christ are to be understood as being bracketed within the larger (cosmic) context of the Total Event of God's working on man's behalf.

<sup>7</sup> Filson, *op. cit.*, p. 156.



Paul especially, among New Testament writers, does not hesitate to identify the Risen Christ with the Holy Spirit. In this way he overcomes the "distance" between the Risen Christ and the realm of human history. The Risen, Transcendent Christ is the Immanent Holy Spirit. Paul makes it plain that the Spirit of God was the Power which brought Jesus forth from the grave and designated him the Son of God in Power, or King-Messiah (Romans 1:3-5; compare Psalm 2). Throughout the Letter to the Romans he implicitly connects the Life-giving Spirit with the Risen Christ, but in Chapter Eight he makes absolutely explicit the thought that the Spirit of Christ raises men of faith from the death of sin just as Jesus was raised from the dead: "For the law of the *Spirit of life in Christ Jesus* has set me free from the law of sin and death. . . . If the *Spirit of him* who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through *his Spirit* which dwells in you" (italics added) (Romans 8:2, 11). The same theme is to be found in Paul's letter to the Galatians (compare 4:6, "Spirit of his Son," and so on).

In II Corinthians there is found a most remarkable passage on this line of thought. Here Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are "a letter from Christ . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (3:3). To state it differently, they are now sharers in the New Covenant ratified in Christ and no longer under the Old Mosaic Covenant or "dispensation of death, carved in letters on stone," which now is superseded and annulled. And since they now live in Christ under the New Covenant they share in the glorious spiritual and moral freedom made possible by the Living Christ at work within them through the Holy Spirit. "Now," writes Paul, "the Lord is the Spirit [the Christ who takes away the 'veil' of the law], and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (3:14-18). This remarkable passage shows that Paul, especially in great moments of inspiration, such as this passage reflects, often had no concern for distinguishing neatly between the working of God the Father, the Son-Christ, and the Holy Spirit. In this passage it is practically impossible to tell which "Lord" Paul has in mind in each case—the Lord



God or the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse Fourteen makes it clear that "Christ" is involved, for the verse states that the veil is taken away "only through Christ."

The "baptism of the Holy Spirit" through Jesus the Christ must also be understood with reference to the reconciling and saving work of God. If "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," he is also in the Holy Spirit reconciling the world to himself. And if sinful men are to share in the reconciling and saving works of God in Christ, they must share in these works through the Christ who died and rose from the dead. But how does a person share in the reconciling and saving works of God in Christ? Paul tells us that this sharing is through the working of the Holy Spirit: ". . . no one can say [confess] 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:3). Christ's "baptism of the Holy Spirit," then, involves the inner witness of the Holy Spirit who enables a person to make the saving confession of faith in Christ.

And along with emphasizing the confession-prompting work of the Holy Spirit, Paul also stresses that the Spirit is the Power at work within man reconciling him to God and saving him from the sin and death principle at work around him and within him (compare Romans 1:4, 16; 7:6; 8:2-17; I Corinthians 2:4, 5; 6:14; Ephesians 3:14-21, and so on). Some very important passages concerning the "power at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20), are to be found in II Corinthians. In speaking of the Word of God, the Gospel, which is the light that shines out of darkness, shining in the hearts of men "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ," Paul refers to the Gospel as a "treasure in earthen vessels," given to men that they might be saved from harm though afflicted, from despair though perplexed, from loneliness though persecuted, from destruction though struck down, and so on. And why will they possess this courage and strength through the Gospel, the Word? It is, Paul answers, because "the *transcendent power belongs to God and not to us*" (*italics added*) (4:7). The "transcendent power," of course, is the Power of the Holy Spirit (5:5) who enables men to confess God in Christ and yield themselves to his Wisdom, Power, and Love. In other words, Paul asserts plainly here that the saving Gospel-Power is not in our presentation of the Gospel ("earthen vessels") but in the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who by faith commit themselves to God



in Christ. The proclamation of the Gospel, therefore, would be powerless without the transcendent Power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit not only witnesses to men concerning the Christ, but he also supplies the Power which enables them to share in the saving grace of God in Christ.

Another "power of God" passage is found in I Corinthians (1; 2). In this passage Paul refers to the Power of the Cross of Christ (1:17, 18) which is in danger of being emptied of its Power by the worldly wisdom of men. But what is this Wisdom and Power of God that ultimately overrules the wisdom and power of men? The Wisdom-Power is Christ (1:24). And this Power and Wisdom are available to believers through the Power of the Holy Spirit (2:4, 5, 10-16). What Paul apparently is saying here is that the Power in the preaching of the Cross is due to the Christ-Spirit Power which is the Power of God Himself. On the basis of human wisdom, therefore, the Cross is foolishness, but on the basis of the Power of the Holy Spirit it loses its foolishness and becomes the Power of God unto salvation. But the Power is not in the Cross as such but in the Christ-Spirit who now works upon the minds and wills of men everywhere.

How, we may ask, is the "baptism of the Spirit" thwarted by man? The answer seems to be: by blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Jesus especially emphasized the mortal danger in this treatment of the Holy Spirit. Because Jesus had healed a blind and dumb man, the Pharisees had accused him of casting out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons. Jesus reminded them that if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself, which does not make sense. "But," Jesus says, "if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. . . . He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:28-32).

Jesus here is stressing the drastic consequences for those who look upon the works of God (Christ's healing of the blind and dumb man) and ascribe these works to Evil. This amounts to a gross perversion of spiritual and moral values based upon pride and prejudice, such as the



Pharisees manifested toward the afflicted "sinner." In their blindness the Pharisees had set themselves against the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus, and consequently they were not able to recognize the coming of the kingdom into their midst. They therefore were guilty of rejection of the Holy Spirit. This, Jesus implied, is the one sin that cannot be forgiven, not because God does not want to reach the Pharisees, but rather because the Pharisees, by malicious and deliberate rebellion against the Light, had not been able to distinguish the work of God from that of "Satan." Thus, because of *their* blindness, they were *not* able to be forgiven. One then is not doomed because he does not accept a given creedal statement or follow a certain Church ritual, but rather is self-doomed by his resistance against the Holy Spirit. So long as this resistance dominates his will he cannot be forgiven, because God cannot forgive against a person's will. Let it be clearly stated that Jesus was surely not speaking of any particular act of sin as being beyond the forgiveness of God, but instead was referring to an inner state of resistance by which the Pharisees had set themselves against the reconciling and saving Word and Power of the Holy Spirit.

But notice that Jesus said that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven "in the age to come." To what age was he referring? It seems reasonable to suppose that his immediate reference was to the age after his Resurrection, when the Son of man would enter into his kingdom and glory (compare Matthew 16:28, and so on), and when the Holy Spirit alone would be working among men without the Incarnate Christ visible in history. In that age, especially, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would be highly dangerous and destructive of human life and community. In the same vein of thought Paul writes to the Thessalonians warning them against the "quenching of the Spirit and the despising of prophecy" (I Thessalonians 4:8; 5:19, 20). And today, because of tradition, prejudice, fear, pride, and so on, many continue to quench the Spirit and despise the preaching of the Word wherein the Word of God in the Spirit comes to sinning man. To quench the Spirit by such unbelief and pride thus grieves the Holy Spirit who comes to men to bless and to save.

But men may also receive the "baptism of the Spirit" with faith, love, and joy. When the Holy Spirit is thus received, the process which is called regeneration takes place. "Regeneration," says Beasley-Murray, "is thus the act whereby the Holy Spirit mediates to us the new

life of the risen Christ."<sup>8</sup> Paul, especially in Romans, deals in detail with the regenerating Power of the Holy Spirit who "realizes" the New Life of Christ in the believer. Consider this marvelous passage: "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus [the Risen] Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand [rather than fall], and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:1-5; compare also 7:4-6; 8:9-11, and so on).

Paul surely is not thinking about some forensic "plan of salvation" that has to be accepted intellectually by the initiate, but rather about a dynamic work of God carried on in the life of the believer enabling him to find victory in defeat and joy in sorrow, and so on. Men may have peace *within* through faith because the Love of God has been poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit. And this Love comes only insofar as the person yields himself to the Holy Spirit. It is never accomplished by absolute divine fiat or by human endeavor alone. The Love of God is realized in the one who believes, that is, in the one who enters into fellowship with the Holy Spirit. It is a mutual person-to-Person fellowship based on trust. This is the renewal about which Paul writes elsewhere: "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another; but when . . . God our Savior appeared [in Jesus the Christ], he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit [baptism of the Holy Spirit], which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus [the Risen] Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:3-6; compare also II Corinthians 3:3).

Thus, in the midst of our "foolish disobedience," in our "existential estrangement," we turn against the Life-Giving Word, Love, and Power of the Holy Spirit, who "proceeds both from the Father and from the

<sup>8</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Christ Is Alive!*, p. 125.



Son." But by faith we share in Eternal Life through the Holy Spirit. "Faith in the New Testament," writes Paul Tillich, "is the state of being grasped by the divine Spirit. As *Spirit* it is the presence of the divine power in the human mind; as *holy Spirit* it is the Spirit of love, justice and truth. I would not hesitate to call this description of the Spirit the answer to the question and the fulfillment of the dynamics which drive the history of faith."<sup>9</sup>

At this point it is fitting to recall what was discussed earlier with reference to the "temple" teachings in the New Testament. There it was shown that the actual "temple of the Jews" gradually was spiritualized in meaning so as to stand for the Christian temple of the Holy Spirit (compare I Corinthians 3:16, 17). And just as the New Spiritual Israel took the place of the old national Israel, according to New Testament teaching, just so the New Spiritual Temple took the place of the old Jewish temple. This simply means that by faith and love *the person himself* becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit or becomes the Holy of holies wherein the Holy Spirit of God dwells and wherein the Great High Priest, the Risen Christ, functions to purge out by spiritual sacrifice the pride and evil which estrange fallen men from God the Saviour.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit not only works to overcome man's existential estrangement from God; he also works to enable man to share in and live the good life. Man's ethical failures are glaringly in evidence, just as much in evidence as were the vices of Paul and his contemporaries (compare Titus 3:3). The Holy Spirit's work in prompting man to "do justice" and "love mercy" is one aspect of his reconciling and saving work, not to be divorced completely from His efforts to bring man into fellowship with God. The fellowship of the Spirit (II Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:1) is both individual (personal) and collective (communal). What work the Holy Spirit does to reconcile man to God he also does to reconcile men to men. There is but one work of the Holy Spirit—to realize the Love (*Agapē*) of God in the lives of men. And because this is so, there is no need for a detailed ethical code for the Christian faith. The New Testament does not contain such a code. John Wick Bowman says that "... the reason the apostolic writings are not full of specific solutions is, not because such cannot be given by the Spirit-filled church, but because the

<sup>9</sup> Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, p. 71.

apostle believed in the prophetic interpretation of history, in the reality of the Spirit's guidance of his church, and in the consequent ability of the Christian under that Spirit's leading to discover solutions to his ethical problems."<sup>10</sup>

And perhaps a vital proclaiming of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit by Christians to a skeptical world of science will serve to turn men of science toward a more realistic consideration of the hope the Christian faith can offer to the world. F. W. Dillistone rightly laments that modern men of science are so openly skeptical about the value of the Christian faith. "In a great era of the world today," he writes, "the leaders of science and technology are frankly contemptuous of the idea that Jesus of Nazareth can have any relation to their enterprise, least of all that his career of life, death, and resurrection holds the secret of the meaning of the whole universal enterprise. Even in the West [where Christianity is strongest] it is the testimony of those who have first-hand contact with the spheres of science and industry that although there may often be a vague belief in the existence of God and the goodness of the man Jesus, there is almost complete skepticism concerning any connection that this might have with man's own labors and goals."<sup>11</sup>

If men of science could be shown by careful reasoning and gentle persuasion that the Holy Spirit is actually working in them and among them to bring them to the Source of all science, even to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3), a new day for the human race would be at hand. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit as a Guide unto all Truth, and this would include all truth beneficial to man, whether spiritual, moral, or otherwise. If Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, then all scientists ought to be able to find him in their experiments and discoveries of scientific truth. For,

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.

<sup>10</sup> John Wick Bowman, *The Religion of Maturity* (Nashville, Tenn., Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948), p. 287.

<sup>11</sup> F. W. Dillistone, "The End of the Historical Era?" *Theology Today*, XIV, 1 (April, 1957), pp. 7, 8.



There is no speech, nor are there words;  
 their voice is not heard;  
 Yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
 and their words to the end of the world.  
 (Psalm 19:1-4)

God is speaking, not in words, but in the Holy Spirit, and he who hears the Holy Spirit hears Christ, and he who hears Christ hears God. Let men of science ponder this!

### The Holy Spirit in Christian Hymns

The neglect of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Christian theology is reflected in the paucity of hymns about the Holy Spirit used in Christian worship. And in the few hymns there are concerning the Holy Spirit, some of them are inadequate in theological depth and range. For example, consider the beautiful hymn by Marcus M. Wells, "Holy Spirit, Faithful Guide":

Holy Spirit, faithful guide,  
 Ever near the Christian's side;  
 Gently lead us by the hand,  
 Pilgrims in a desert land;  
 Weary souls fore'er rejoice  
 While they hear that sweetest voice,  
 Whispering softly, "Wanderer, come!  
 Follow Me, I'll guide thee home."

But when one studies this hymn, he finds no relation between the Holy Spirit and the Risen Christ expressed. The Holy Spirit as a Guide is movingly told, but beyond this the hymn does not go. The revealing, reconciling, and saving work of the Holy Spirit is ignored. The abundance of the teachings of the New Testament on the Holy Spirit might as well never have been written. Also, the only reference to the atoning work of Christ is a reference to the blood of Jesus in Stanza Three:

. . . Fearing not the dismal flood,  
 Pleading nought but Jesus' blood. . . .

The abundance of teachings in the New Testament that ground the atoning work of God in the Total Event of the Incarnation, Cross, and

Resurrection are unknown to the writer of this hymn. What was shown above (Chapter IV) with regard to hymns about the Cross may rightly be said of certain hymns about the Holy Spirit—they fail to relate the Cross and the Holy Spirit to the Risen Lord. This is a task that needs very much to be done.

President Nathan M. Pusey also said in his speech: “[Religion’s place] above all is to help each of us to see that where torment and darkness lie there also is light, and in the *depth of mystery a face*” [*italics added*].<sup>12</sup> That Face, we may say, is the Face of the Holy Spirit.

O Holy Spirit of God, may we see thy Face in the depth of mystery. Let us not be turned aside by the particular and the material, but rather help us to behold thy Visage in the gently swaying leaves blown by thy Breath, in the twinkling beams from the stars like thy Eyes upon us, in the murmuring ripple of the brook which reminds us of thy Voice, and in the cherry-tinged cheek of the sleeping babe let us behold thy Countenance of Peace and Purity which will sooth our troubled spirits and give us moral strength and spiritual hope for the days to come. No matter what may come, give us the vision of faith to behold thy Face in the depth of mystery. Through the Lord Jesus Christ—Amen.

<sup>12</sup> Dedication of the Robert E. Speer Library at Princeton Theological Seminary.



## CHAPTER IX

# SAVED BY THE CHURCH

... Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.<sup>1</sup>

The church's one foundation  
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
She is His new Creation,  
By Spirit and the Word:  
From heaven He came and sought her  
To be His holy bride,  
With His own blood He bought her,  
And for her life He died.<sup>2</sup>

### The Third Distortion

There have been many Christians through the ages who have attempted to identify the Church with the world. Very early in Christian history the leaders of the Church became more and more engrossed in its external structure, that is, in its organization, ritual, government, and canons and creeds. This institutionalizing of the Church, of course, was due in part to its reacting against certain outside opponents and pressures, such as gnosticism and the state; but, nevertheless, the end result was disastrous for the Church, because Christians then came to think of the Church as a closed system of doctrine and order which must clearly be distinguished from other movements and institutions. Later, when the Christian Church was united with the Roman state under Constantine, the idea of the

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 5:23.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel J. Stone, "The Church's One Foundation."

Church as an earthly kingdom was born. More and more, as the centuries rolled along, the Church took on the structure of a state with its earthly potentate and his court.

To this very day, for millions of Christians, the Church is known as a magnificent kingdom of God on earth, structured down to the smallest detail and governed by a hierarchy of officials who reign over this kingdom with absolute power, having received this power to rule, supposedly, from Christ the King himself. By the fiction of "historical apostolic succession" the rulers of the Church continue to hold their power and prestige over millions of "subjects" who must submit themselves unreservedly and uncritically to the régime. Even in so-called nonhierarchical churches, the tendency to identify the Church with the churches is quite evident. These nonhierarchical churches also have their administrators and officials (presidents, ruling elders, bishops, deacons, denominational secretaries, organizers, promoters, and so on) who see that the machinery of the Church is kept in motion. Whereas it must be admitted that a certain amount of institutional machinery is necessary, it also must be pointed out that there is always the danger that a given organizational structure may be construed as an *end* in itself, rather than as a *means* to an end. Oftentimes denominational officials become little rulers in their own eyes and seek to bring the Church under their own control.

There is every indication in the New Testament that Church "officials" were not to be officials in the usual sense of the word, that is, as the word is used for example in the political or business worlds. Jesus made it clear to his disciples that there were to be no official rankings among his followers. "You know," he said, "that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But *it shall not be so among you*; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came *not to be served but to serve*, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*italics added*) (Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:24-27; Matthew 20:20-28). Jesus' talk about the servitude of the Son of man must have sounded strange to his disciples, especially after they had heard him speak of the Son of man coming into his kingdom with great power and glory (compare Matthew 16:28; Mark 8:38; 9:1, and so on); but Jesus, John reports, not only taught them of the democratic



equality which was to characterize the Church, but even demonstrated his (and their) servitude by washing the disciples' feet during the Last Supper (John 13:1-11).

John specifically points out that Jesus connected this demonstration of servitude with his coming death and Resurrection: "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel . . . and began to wash the disciples' feet . . ." (13:3-5). And when Peter showed puzzlement and drew back when Jesus was preparing to wash his feet, Jesus said to him: "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand" (13:7). Certainly Jesus was here speaking of the post-Resurrection era or the era of the Church in which his disciples would themselves function as "servants." The symbolic act of servitude Jesus was now performing upon them would later be understood as indicative of his continuing service in their midst as the Son of man, truly in his glory, yet working among them in the Holy Spirit. After his death and Resurrection his disciples would fully understand that the Son of man who had been in their midst as the Suffering Servant, was now just as truly the Suffering Servant and Risen King, coming to serve them through the Holy Spirit in the Church. He would still be serving them, and they in turn would be his servants and the servants of all men.

Hence, we conclude that Jesus did not visualize any hierarchy of persons with official ranks among his disciples, but rather taught them by word and deed that they were to be *great* by being servants, and that their "offices" in the Church were not to be construed in terms of *authoritative ranks* but in terms of *ministerial function* only. Paul later understood this clearly, and pointed out that the many functions within the Church, teaching, prophesying, and so on, were to be recognized as gifts of the Spirit (compare I Corinthians 12:1-11). We conclude, then, that the one infallible authority in the Church resides not in any person or persons, or in any ritual or creed or book, but rather in the Living Lord Jesus Christ who is both King and Suffering Servant, and who continues to *rule* and to *serve* within the living Church through the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, the Church understood as the kingdom of God on earth has often been identified with the secular state. The idea

of the union of Church and state itself implies a conception of the Church that the New Testament will not support, that is, that the Church is an institution which can be united with a political state. But whenever the Church permits itself to be united with a secular state it sells its own birthright for a mess of pottage. It then becomes an institution "owned and operated" by men who administer its affairs and dole out its benefits to any customer who comes with the proper price. It loses the "transcendent power which is from God" and becomes only a plaything in the hands of finite and selfish men. When this happens, the church is not the Church, but rather a highly complex business peddling the Word of God ("means of grace") to the hungry consumer (compare II Corinthians 2:17).

What all this means, of course, is that the Word of God is construed as something that can and should be handed on from one generation to another, and from one person to another in written or in ritual form to be taken in small doses as needed. The assumption is that the Word of God is something *given in the past* and preserved by human effort and ingenuity and passed on from one to another on the horizontal plane. The vertical dimension and vital quality of the Word are lost from view. On this view, God is conceived of as *having spoken* and appointed His priests and prophets to officiate over the Church, but He is not regarded as a God who continues to speak to the Church through the Holy Spirit. God's voice is dead, for He is conceived, in deistic fashion, as a silent and distant God waiting for His children to follow out His instructions printed in book and creed and handed down from generation to generation by tradition. There should be no need to point out how far removed such conceptions are from the New Testament message. This, we should be reminded, is just one of the phases of the "theology of the past" we have already discussed in an earlier chapter of this book.

As we have seen thus far, the "theology of the past" led to certain serious distortions of the Christian faith at vital points. For one thing, the meaning of the Cross was distorted because its meaning was understood to be found in the past historical event itself. The Incarnation too was distorted in meaning as men attempted to understand its significance entirely in terms of *Jesus the man*. This often resulted in a liberalizing humanism or in a rather curious type of romantic fundamentalism. Further distortions have resulted from the identification of



the Word of God with human wisdom and words, of the Christ with Jesus of Nazareth (see above on Incarnation), and of the Church with the world.

The one principle that runs through all these distortions is quite obvious. The mistake has been failure to see the fundamental distinction between God and the world, between eternity and time, between Deity and humanity, between God's Spirit and the human spirit, between God's way and men's ways, between the Eternal Logos of God and the finite wisdom of men. Whenever Christians learn from the Scriptures and from the Guide who leads into all Truth, even the Holy Spirit, that the things of God and the things of men are never to be absolutely identified, a new day in Christian theology and life will be the result. Truly, then the Church will be One, with one Body, one Spirit, one Hope, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism [of the Spirit], and one God and Father of all, "who is above all and through all and in all" (compare Ephesians 4:3-6). And the one doctrine in the New Testament, it seems to me, that will provide the hermeneutical basis for the overcoming of these distortions in the Christian faith is the doctrine of Christ's Resurrection and return into history in the Holy Spirit of Wisdom (Word), Love, and Power.

### *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*

In a very real sense there is "no salvation outside the Church" of the Living Christ. But this is not to speak of the *historical* Church, the *institution* that so many identify with the Church of God. This is to speak, rather, of the True Church which is the universal Body of Christ, partaking in the historical order but never bound by historical particularity. The Church continually transforms historical particularity, but is in turn never transformed by historical finitude. The Church is in history, in other words, but history is not in the Church. The Church operates *through* history (and nature), but history (and nature) is never the Church. The Universal Church is particularized in history, but the particular can never be the Universal. So the Church (like the Holy Spirit Himself) is the Universal particularized, but it forever transcends the particular.

In dealing with the nature of the Church, the New Testament writers consistently relate the Church to the Lord Jesus Christ-Spirit.

The Church is described variously under some very striking and significant metaphors—the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Household of God,<sup>3</sup> and so on. In other words, the Church is Christ in “essence,” for its Life and Power are rooted in his transcendent-immanent Presence in it. In its “existence,” it participates both in Christ and in the world, and as an existing Church it suffers the same limitations and imperfections known to all things which exist. The Church, therefore, is not perfect, but it is infilled with the Perfection which drives it onward and upward toward the “heavenly places” in Christ. And because of the Church’s essential-existential nature it has a *calling* and a *task* which can have for its goal no less than the proclaiming of the Gospel (in existential message) among men and the “realizing” of the Gospel (in its Essential Life) in men so far as it is able. Its task is not merely to “talk” but to “be,” not merely to “admonish” but to “lead,” not merely to save men’s souls for heaven, but to save men within society, not merely to worship God but to serve Him and men. If the existing Church is imperfect, it should not be content to remain so. If social evils exist among men, the Church should not stand idly by and avoid its responsibility to preach, teach, and live the Gospel for the benefit of the whole man and for all of men in all the relationships of life.

Perhaps the most significant metaphor Paul uses to designate the nature or structure of the Church is the “Body of Christ” (compare Romans 12:4–21; I Corinthians 10:17; 11:29; 12:12–31, and so on). The meaning of this phrase staggers our imagination when we attempt to analyze it. But the important thing to note is that the Church is conceived as the *Body of Christ*. For Paul there is no Church without Christ. Paul completes the “body” metaphor in Ephesians: “. . . and he [God] has put all things under his feet and has made him [the Risen Christ] head over all things for the church, which is his *body*, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (italics added) (1:22, 23). Christ is the Head of the Church which is his Body. He directs its affairs and guides it toward its true destiny, according to God’s hidden and mysterious plan of the ages (1:9, 10; 3:9–12, and so on). He works within the Church through the Holy Spirit. “The relation between Christ and the Church,” writes W. O. Carver, “. . . is not an external

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (New York, Friendship Press, 1954), for a stimulating and inspiring treatment on this theme.



relation, nor one simply of Superior and inferior, Sovereign and subject, but one of life and incorporation. The Church is not merely an institution ruled by Him as President, a Kingdom in which He is the Supreme Authority, or a vast company of men in moral sympathy with Him, but a Society which is in vital connection with Him, having the source of its life in Him, sustained and directed by His power [the Spirit], the instrument also by which He works. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

In his very excellent exposition of the book of Ephesians, John A. Mackay, in his classic way, states the relationship between Christ and the Church thus: "This book deals with what is called *God's Order*. By *God's Order* is meant the essential structure of spiritual reality, which has its source in God and whose development is determined by the will of God. . . . The Structure or 'Order' thus envisaged has its center in Jesus Christ. Christ constitutes its core. The development of this structure holds the promise and sets the task of the future, not only the future of human history, but the future of cosmic history as well. . . . *God's Order* actually exists, however imperfectly, in the Christian Church, which God has designed to be the true integrating center and pattern for human life and relations. This 'Order,' as outlined in the inspired vision of St. Paul, will achieve its ultimate dimension through what he describes 'as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him [that is, in Christ], things in heaven and things on earth' (Eph. 1:10)."<sup>5</sup> It would be difficult to improve on this analysis of Paul's view of Christ's relationship to the Church and of the Church's earthly and cosmic function and task.

The central idea in Paul's "Body of Christ" metaphor is obviously the idea of "unity." This is a theme which Paul never tires of stressing. In his letters to the Corinthians, who were fighting among themselves and thus breaking the unity of the Body of Christ, he develops this theme along several lines, but especially in relation to the Lord's Supper. Because of several serious factions in the church, the Corinthian Christians had developed the attitudes of animosity, rivalry, jealousy, and so on, which had destroyed the "fellowship of the Spirit" (II Corinthians 13:14) and had turned the Lord's Supper into a lordly banquet (I Corinthians 10:21; 11:20-34), because each had tried to

<sup>4</sup> W. O. Carver, *The Glory of God in the Christian Calling* (Nashville, Tenn., Broadman Press, 1949), p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> Mackay, *God's Order*, p. ix.

outdo the other in bringing a sumptuous meal from their homes to be eaten at the "church" in connection with the observance of the Lord's Supper. But their greediness and pride had got the best of them, and the result was a mockery of the Lord's Supper, because some had even become intoxicated with strong drink and had fallen to quarreling, thus "profaning the body and blood of the Lord" and failing to discern the Body, that is, losing sight of the essential meaning and purpose of the Lord's Supper. In the light of this description of the broken fellowship at Corinth, it is not surprising to find Paul having much to say about the Lord's Supper to the Corinthians. But for the present moment let us turn to another metaphor.

The Church is sometimes called the Bride of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7; 21:2, 9, 10; 22:17) or, by association with human marriage, the Bride of Christ (compare Ephesians 5:23-33). The use of the idea of marital relationship to portray the relationship between Christ and the Church made it possible for the writers of the New Testament to express various fundamental ideas concerning the nature and function of the Church. First, the idea was used to emphasize the headship of Christ over the Church: "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior" (Ephesians 5:23). Second, the idea was used to stress the love which Christ has for the Church in that he gave himself for her in death so that she might be cleansed and purified, holy and without blemish when she is presented before him as his Bride (Ephesians 5:25-29; Revelation 19:7, 8). Third, the idea was used, no doubt, to suggest the fact and necessity of faithfulness in the marital state between Christ and his Bride. Once a man has left his father and mother to be joined to his wife, they are to become one and to remain faithful and loving to the end. So it is with Christ and his Bride—they shall become One in love and faithfulness unto the end. Herein was a compelling appeal to the Church to remain a faithful Bride to Christ until the end of time, faithful in love and service.

In one of the most strikingly beautiful passages in the New Testament, Paul speaks of the Church as the Household of God (Ephesians 2:11-22). The ideas of unity, peace, harmony, and fellowship are of course associated with this meaningful metaphor. Paul begins by pointing out that God's fellowship with man has been broken by man's sin and rebellion, but that God in the abundance of His mercy has come



to man in Christ to forgive and to reconcile man unto Himself, which also results in the reconciliation of men with men. Thus Paul makes a strong point of the peace that comes to all men, Jews and Gentiles, through Christ making all men one. "For he is our peace," he writes, "who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end" (Ephesians 2:14-16).

It is difficult to state the tremendous implications of such a passage as the above. Surely Paul is sitting "in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6) as he writes these inspired words. Although Paul does not use the word "fellowship" (*koinōnia*) in this particular context, the central idea is that of fellowship, fellowship between men and God and between men and men in Christ. He describes the fellowship as the "Household of God" and as a "holy Temple in the Lord." (At this point what was said earlier about the Temple of the Holy Spirit needs to be recalled.) And Paul makes it plain in this passage that it is through Christ that we have access to the Father in one Spirit (Ephesians 2:18). It is the Christ-Spirit working in the inner man that causes the fellowship to grow into a holy Temple in the Lord.

In a matchless prayer and benediction, Paul rises to the heights of inspired expression as he comes to the close of this magnificent passage in Ephesians: "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever" (*italics added*) (Ephesians 3:14-21). No one can ever be the same or be satisfied with a provincial or sectarian view of the Church

after being struck by the full force of Paul's cosmic view of the Household of God in this passage.

If we grant that the Church is the Body of Christ, the Fellowship of the Spirit, the Household of God, the Bride of Christ, the Church of the Living God, the Pillar and Bulwark of Truth (I Timothy 3:15), and so on, what part then does it play in the reconciling and saving works of God in Christ? Professor Wolf says: "More needs to be heard about the Church as an extension of the Atonement."<sup>6</sup> Perhaps more will be heard on this subject, because, in the light of the Resurrection faith now becoming more articulate in the Church, more Christians are becoming aware of the essential role the Church plays as an agency used of God to reconcile the world unto Himself.

We have said, citing Paul, that "God was [and is] in Christ reconciling the world to himself." It would also be proper to say that God was and is in the Holy Spirit and in the Church reconciling the world to Himself, because the Holy Spirit is Christ at work in the Church which is his Body through which and by means of which the Lord God is making men one with Himself and one with another in the Household of God. If we are being saved by the Lord Jesus Christ who lived and died and rose again from the dead, then the Church, which is his Body, is the one *existing* agency, made up of a fellowship of persons, which can serve him as his historical Word, proclaimed in preaching, ordinance (sacrament), prayer, and service. The Church is in a sense a continuation of the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection, for just as the Eternal Christ took up his abode in the body of the man Jesus, so the Eternal Christ-Spirit now takes up and continues his abode in his Body the Church.

In other words, the God who was working in the man Jesus is now working in the Body of Christ, the Church. But such universal and mind-overwhelming concepts would never have found expression in the preaching of the disciples or in the writing of the New Testament, if it had not been for the shattering truth of the Resurrection of Christ from the dead to take up his Reign at the right hand of the Throne on High. "Within a few days after his execution," writes Charles Duell Kean, "those who had been associated most intimately with Jesus became convinced that he was still with them as the most powerful force in their lives—indeed he was more effective than he had

<sup>6</sup> Wolf, *No Cross, No Crown*, p. 206.



been as a wandering rabbi on the Galilee roads. Their conviction was much more dynamic than any belief that Jesus' spirit had somehow survived. It was rather, 'He is risen,' and in history he has a new body—the Body of Christ—in which all those for whom he is the Lord have a part. . . ."<sup>7</sup>

One could earnestly wish that the day will soon come when Christians everywhere will realize that Christ is more effective when he is seen and accepted as the Risen Lord than when he is seen as a "wandering rabbi on the Galilee roads." For too many Christians he is still *back there* on those roads or *on the Cross*, making their Christian experience sentimentally romantic, doctrinaire and scholastic, moralistic and puritanical, traditional and churchly, and lacking in the depth and warmth and vitality of an experience which grows out of a fellowship with the Ever-Present Christ in and through the Community of believers, the Church. No body of ideas, such as those outlined above, will do more to revitalize the Church and cause it to be seen in its universal outreach, as well as in its particular works of worship, evangelization, and service for the King of kings, than those ideas growing out of the Resurrection faith of the early Christians.

Among many teachings in the New Testament available for a study of the reconciling and saving role of the Church is one in particular which we shall use here, and which we have already cited in another connection. This teaching is found in Ephesians. Paul's language is so all-inclusive here that it is difficult to come to grips with his ideas in detail. He begins with a reference to the redemption and forgiveness of trespasses which men have through the blood of Christ (1:7), but moves immediately to the Resurrection theme which centers in the Christ who was slain but now is exalted above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and who is now "head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (1:20-23). Paul then moves in an ever-rising spiral of ideas to the point where he asserts unequivocally that reconciliation of men to God is accomplished through the Body of Christ (2:16).

Some have understood Paul's use of the word "body" in this passage to refer to the physical body of Jesus on the Cross. But this is to miss Paul's main argument in Ephesians. True, he does write "one" body,

<sup>7</sup> Charles Duell Kean, *God's Word to His People* (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1956), p. 156.

which would seem to indicate that he was thinking of the "one" physical body of Jesus on the Cross; but a glance at 4:4 will reveal that he can write "one" with reference to the Body of Christ, the Church. Further light is thrown on this passage by a study of the word "body" (*sōma*) as compared with the word "flesh" (*sarks*), which Paul uses in 2:15, where he refers to the abolishing of the law of commandments and ordinances in the "flesh" (Cross, probably) of Christ. But even here it is not certain that Paul is thinking only of the physical body of Christ on the Cross. Paul usually used the word "flesh" to refer to the whole man, or to a certain type of man, that is, to unregenerate man. Paul certainly would not have used the term in this sense with reference to Jesus the Christ. But he could have been thinking of Jesus as *the man of flesh* who, by his sinless life and sacrificial death, and by his keeping the law, abolished it, and opened up the way for those who by faith find forgiveness for sin through his blood, that is, by dying with him to rise to walk in newness of life (compare Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 2:19-21, and so on). (Later we shall deal with the bearing the ordinances or sacraments have on the subject under discussion.)

On the other hand, when Paul uses the word "body" (*sōma*), he seldom if ever uses it with reference to the physical flesh as such. Like the word "flesh," he often uses the word "body" to describe a certain type of man and never as the physical part of man as distinguished from his "soul" (*psychē*). Paul avoided all such dualistic (Greek) views of man's make-up. This is why his holistic conception of "body" could serve him well, when he needed a word to describe the "whole" Church as the Body of Christ. It was an all-inclusive word for Paul, and he evidently so used it in Ephesians 2:16.

If this is so, his thought here is clear. Through the Cross principle the Church, the Body of the Risen Christ (1:20-23), will function as God's agency for the reconciliation and salvation of all who will hear the Word of God proclaimed by the Church and will come in faith through the Holy Spirit to God for forgiveness and renewal of life. Paul, therefore, would agree that there is no salvation for men outside the Church; for to him the Church is the Body of Christ through which the God-Christ-Holy-Spirit works to reconcile the *world* and *all things* unto Himself. Paul surely does not think of the Church as a collection of local churches, though the Church includes such local



churches. To Paul, and to all the New Testament writers evidently, the Church, while often addressed in particular settings, was not understood to be a historical institution as such, but rather the universal sway of God's Word and grace as mediated to men in fellowship with God through the Living Christ and Holy Spirit. Therefore, we must conclude that every local congregation has its part and place to fill in the reconciling and saving works of God in Christ, but that no one person or congregation should think of himself or itself as an indispensable means of grace.

The New Testament teaching on baptism and the Lord's Supper helps us to define the nature and function of the Church. These ordinances do serve as aspects of the Word of God at work within the Church, for they do, to some extent, deliver a message of God's saving grace to believers and unbelievers. Baptism stands for the believer's death, burial, and resurrection with Christ and not merely for an "act of obedience" because Christ commanded it. Baptism indicates that the believer has *died to self* with Christ and through the Power of the Risen Christ has *risen with him* to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-11). And how did the believer come to this death and resurrection with Christ? Not by any mechanical distribution of the means of grace in the act of baptism on the part of a historical institution called a church, we may confidently assert, but rather by the Living Christ whose death and life are enacted within the believer by the Holy Spirit working within the Church. In this sense the Lord Jesus Christ is actually present with the believer as he is baptized in water as a sign of his spiritual death and resurrection with Christ in the Spirit.

Whereas baptism is the ordinance to be enacted by the individual believer as a sign of his commitment to Christ in the Spirit, the Lord's Supper is an ordinance for the fellowship of believers in the collective sense. When Jesus ate the Last Supper with his disciples, this meal was his last fellowship with them as a group until after his Resurrection. After he had concluded his teachings concerning his death at the Supper, he said something to his disciples that they probably did not quite grasp at the time: "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). Evidently Jesus was here referring to the post-Resurrection era of the

Church when he would eat and drink again with his followers in the fellowship meal called the Lord's Supper.

Without the Resurrection which followed, this saying of Jesus at the Last Supper would have never had meaning for the disciples. The Christ who would die for them, thus demonstrating God's love for and judgment upon sinful men, would likewise rise, to work in them through the Holy Spirit to enable them by faith and love to deny self and rise with him to newness of life, that is, to share in the Eternal Life of God. For those who were Jews, the Old Israel and the Old Covenant would be transformed into the New Israel and the New Covenant by the Cross and Resurrection of Christ; for now the New Israel and the New Covenant would be recognized as movements of the Spirit working in each person for his transformation and renewal in Christ. The New Covenant of Jeremiah thus finds fulfillment in the Body of Christ and in the Lord's Supper as the sign of the Presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of believers who are being saved from the law of sin and death.

In the book of Acts the early Christians are described as breaking bread in their homes and partaking of food with glad and generous hearts, indicating that the fellowship meal they were sharing was not observed in a solemn, funereal mood, but rather in a joyous and thankful mood, because their crucified Lord was alive again and with them now in the Spirit, drinking the cup anew with them as he had promised (Acts 2:42-47). Although the Lord's Supper is not specifically mentioned here, there is every reason to suppose that it was observed in connection with these love (*agapē*) meals observed by the early Church.<sup>8</sup>

By far the most important passages on the nature and function of the Church as reflected in the observance of the Lord's Supper are to be found in I Corinthians. Against the background of division and strife within the church at Corinth, Paul urges the divided church to consider the basic ideas of unity and fellowship implied in the observing of the Lord's Supper. He writes, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there

<sup>8</sup> See Stagg, *The Book of Acts*, pp. 65-67.



is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf" (10:16, 17). This is to say that when the Church observes the Lord's Supper a fellowship (*koinōnia*) in the blood and body (Cross) of Christ is taking place. But what does this mean? How can they actually participate (share) in the "blood" of Christ? The only way that this can be done is for Christ himself to bring his "blood" and "body" to them by distributing his body to them in the Spirit. Perhaps this is the implied meaning of the "one loaf" (*artos*, bread, food) from which the "many" who are "one body" partake, as did the five thousand, for example, who were fed from a few small loaves broken and multiplied by the Master. Perhaps Paul has this miracle in mind and perhaps he does not. In either case it is clear that he is thinking of the distribution and multiplication of the "one loaf" (Cross) to the "many" making up the one Body, the Church.

In other language, what is the meaning of this highly complex argument Paul is using to impress the Corinthians with the need for unity and fellowship within the Church? To keep in mind that Paul is writing from the perspective of the Resurrection will help. It is the Risen Christ who is still breaking the loaves to feed the hungry multitudes with the Bread of Life. It is the Risen Christ who shares with them his Cross in order that they might die to self with him and rise with him to walk in newness of Life. But how does he share his life-giving blood with them? The answer is: through his Spirit within the Body which is the Church. The Eternal Life which is his he shares with his followers in and through the Fellowship of believers who participate in his Cross and Resurrection through the Spirit. That Paul has the Holy Spirit in mind here, though the Spirit is not mentioned, is borne out by what he writes a little later on.

To repeat, it is difficult to understand Paul's highly metaphorical language at this point unless one keeps in mind (1) the desecration of the Lord's Supper on the part of the Corinthians by their greed, pride, jealousy, and unbecoming conduct at the meal, and (2) the Resurrection perspective of his faith. The latter is clearly reflected in the following passage: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with [the Risen] Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized [which water-baptism indicates] into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit [which the Lord's



Supper indicates]" (12:12, 13). It seems reasonable that we should connect the "drink of one Spirit" metaphor in this passage with the "one loaf" metaphor in the passage already discussed (10:16, 17). There Paul is primarily concerned, so it seems, with the "body" (Church) which is "fed" by partaking of the "one loaf" (Bread), although he does, at that point, mention their "participation in the blood of Christ."

This highly metaphorical language reminds us of Jesus' "hard saying" which troubled his hearers, when he said that they must "eat his flesh" and "drink his blood" if they were to live forever (John 6:25-65). Since Jesus expected his hearers to regard his words as "spirit and life," so Paul expects his readers to think in terms of "spirit and life," that is, in terms of whole persons and their volitional, psychological, and emotional make-up, and so on. For this reason we are not to interpret Paul (or Jesus) literally and/or mechanically. Paul is not teaching "transubstantiation" or "consubstantiation" here, or any other "theory" of the Lord's Supper; but, rather, attempting to help his readers to see that the Bread of Life which they "eat" and the Blood (Wine) of Life which they "drink" in the Spirit are a sharing (participation) in the New Life, the New Being of God in Christ. In other words Paul regards both baptism and the Lord's Supper as being a participation in the Spirit who "realizes" the death and Resurrection in the believing person. This can never be construed in a physical or mechanical way, but must always be understood in terms of the I-Thou encounter or in terms of the personal encounter between God and man in the Christ-Spirit.

One further confirmation of this line of thought may be found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Here, too, the idea of "unity" is uppermost in his mind. He calls upon his readers to lead lives worthy of the calling to which they have been called and to forbear one another with patience and in love, always endeavoring to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:1-3). The unity in peace which they are to enjoy is theirs through faith in the One God who makes known and available to them his mysterious Plan of the Ages (Total Event) *through the agency of the Church, the Body of Christ* (3:9, 10). The Unity of God's Purpose and Work Paul expresses in deathless language: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one



faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (4:4-6).

It is significant to note that Paul mentions the "one baptism" in this passage; but why does he omit a specific reference to the "one Lord's Supper"? It is certain that he is not thinking here merely of one specific act or mode of baptism as such, for the mode of baptism was not a point of contention in the early Church. It is quite certain that immersion was the accepted practice (compare Roman 6:1-11, for example). He undoubtedly is thinking of the "one baptism of the Spirit" (compare I Corinthians 12:13) in this connection. But what about the Lord's Supper? There are perhaps several possible answers. First, his omission of any specific reference to the Lord's Supper helps us to know that he was not thinking so much of the ordinances (sacraments) themselves, but rather was thinking of the quality of the Church's life and ministry in the "unity of the Spirit" as reflected not only in the ordinances, but in all aspects of the life and ministry of the Church as a saving agency of God among men. Second, Paul may have been *thinking* of the Lord's Supper when he wrote the words "one body" and the "one Spirit," for, as we have observed, he understood the Lord's Supper as the ordinance in which were commemorated the eating of the "one loaf," the *Bread of Life*, and the drinking of the blood in the Spirit, which, to coin a phrase, we may call the *Cup of Life* (compare I Corinthians 10:16, 17; 11:27-29; 12:12, 13). Let us remind ourselves again at this point that these metaphors are not to be taken in a literal sense, but rather are intended to convey the meaning of the New Life of God in Christ brought to the believer in the Holy Spirit of Wisdom, Love, and Power."<sup>9</sup>

One of the tragedies of the Christian Church is that contention and division have split the Church into many fragments, each fragment claiming to be *the church*. And the saddest part of all is that the divisions have come largely as a result of contention over the Lord's Supper, the one ordinance designed to teach and preserve unity within the Church. How Christians ought to long for the day when Christ's Body will again be One and when contention, jealousy, bitterness, and strife will no longer find expression among those who are sons of God through the Prince of Peace!

<sup>9</sup> For further study on the meaning of the sacraments, see the excellent book by D. M. Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments*.

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1:3, 7; 2:4-6.  
<sup>2</sup> D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 199.

This study began with a discussion of "man against God." Man, by rebellion and sin in his existential estrangement, turns away from God and against God, seeking to live by himself, for himself, and within himself. "Man for himself" is therefore "man against God." In his resistance of God's reconciling and saving grace operating upon him in the Christ-Spirit, man is like one in a frail bark struggling against the onrushing stream. God's turbulent stream of judgment and mercy will carry man's light bark into the placid sea of the Water of Life, if man will but permit himself to be borne along in the process, endeavoring only to keep his tiny craft in the main stream of God's love and

### Retrospect and Prospect

. . . it is not irrelevant to remember that St. Paul connects the atoning work of Christ very closely not only with his Cross and passion, but also with His Resurrection, His victory, His risen life.<sup>2</sup>

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. . . . In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. . . . But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus [*italics added*].<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER X SAVED BY HIS LIFE: MAN FOR GOD



mercy. When man struggles "against the stream," his frail boat begins to drift toward the rocky shore where in the swirling eddies his craft is broken apart and he is engulfed in the torrents of self-destruction. "For God so loved the world [the stream of grace] that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish [destroy himself] but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

It is beyond our purpose in this study to discuss the nature of the "final state of the wicked," but this much may be said in passing. If one accepts the idea that man is *truly free and responsible*, he must of necessity accept at least the possibility of man's resisting God to the bitter end. But the extreme views of eternal punishment and torment must be rejected as the product of sadistic aberrations of the human mind. Anyone who can conceive of the righteous and loving God as an eternal torturer of finite man is not thinking within the basic assumptions of the New Testament faith. For God to torture men eternally for finite offenses would be injustice indeed. But, fortunately, we are not shut up to this unbiblical and abhorrent conclusion. Man's end certainly may be disastrous, but it will not involve torture on God's part, but rather self-inflicted demise on man's part, as he cuts himself off from the Life which is made available for him in the Christ-Spirit. To reject God's Love is to destroy one's self. To quit breathing the air is to bring on physical death. To quit breathing the "breath of the Holy Spirit" is to bring on spiritual death. Some will probably query: Do not the Scriptures teach that man's "soul" is *immortal* and therefore cannot be destroyed by man, or even by God Himself? My conviction is that the Scriptures do not teach the immortality of the soul *per se*, but rather that *man*, the whole man, is *mortal* and therefore may finally die a spiritual death apart from God, which means, in others terms, total destruction of the self. The idea of the immortality of the soul is a Greek teaching based upon a dualistic conception of man's make-up. However, we need not go further with this line of discussion.<sup>3</sup>

Following the discussion of "man against God," we then dealt with two points of view that have resulted in serious distortions of the

<sup>3</sup> On the Hebrew-Christian versus the Greek view of man, see two very important books: W. David Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man* (New York, St. Martins Press, 1956), and D. R. G. Owen, *Body and Soul* (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1956).

Christian faith; namely, the worship of "Jesus," or the "theology of the Incarnation," and the isolating of the Cross as the one ground of man's salvation, or the "theology of the Cross." Through the next five chapters we attempted to show that "God was in the [Risen] Christ reconciling the world unto himself." We labored to show that the New Testament writers all wrote from the perspective of the Resurrection and formulated their theology from the standpoint of the Resurrection, but not in the least minimizing the place that the Incarnation and Cross hold in God's saving works. And, I repeat, this analysis is not an effort on my part to minimize the place and meaning of the Cross itself, but only an effort to show that the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection must be kept constantly in mutually inclusive tension, if the theology of the New Testament is to be understood. We were also concerned to reveal that God's reconciling and saving actions in history on man's behalf must be understood as being carried out by the transcendent Risen and Reigning Christ who is also immanent in human life and affairs through the Word, the Spirit, and the Church. In connection with these modes of God's working in the Christ-Word-Spirit in the Church, we pointed out that at least three serious distortions have taken place in Christian theology; namely, the identification of the Word with human wisdom and words, of the Christ with Jesus, and of the Church with the world, all of which illustrate in one way or another certain aspects of the "theology of the past" we have sought to define and delineate.

We come now to the last chapter. Here we shall attempt to show how "man against God" becomes "man for God." One concern will be to show how the New Testament writers understood the reconciling and saving works of God in the Christ-Spirit in relation to the Cross-Resurrection Event and how they formulated their theology using the Cross-Resurrection motif throughout. This section of the book should show very clearly how closely the New Testament writers kept the Cross and Resurrection connected in their thinking, even though there are a very few instances in which they seemed to be presenting the Cross in isolation (for example, I Corinthians 2:2). They viewed God's work in Christ as a "process" which needed to be looked at now from one side (Cross) and now from another (Resurrection); but like those looking at a beautiful sunset, they saw the whole and not the parts. The process the New Testament authors were attempt-



ing to describe and preach was like a many-faceted diamond which is beautiful to behold in its wholeness, but difficult to see in terms of its minute sparkling facets. When they did turn aside to discuss or proclaim one of these facets (Cross), they did so for very definite reasons and without actually losing sight of the Resurrection.

The seeming isolation of the Cross, for example, can partially be explained, I think, in terms of their desire at times to stress the fact of Jesus' death, especially in opposition to those who were intent on denying the significance of his death, either on religious or on philosophical grounds. An example of this stressing of the Cross may be found in I Corinthians where both Jews and Gentiles were opposing Paul's teachings on the Cross as "folly." But Paul argues that there is both "wisdom" and "power" in the preaching of the Cross because God is using the Cross as a means of saving those who believe. "For the word [preaching] of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God," writes Paul (1:18). The Jews and Gentiles (Greeks) could not understand why Paul was making so much of the Cross, doubtless because they were thinking only in terms of a historical event, whereas Paul was thinking primarily in terms of a spiritual and moral process going on in the believer through the Power of God, as well as thinking of it as a historical event. "For Jews demand signs," writes Paul, "and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*" (italics added) (1:22-24). In other words, for Paul the historical event of the Cross has no meaning and power in itself; rather, its power and wisdom are of God who ever works in the Risen Christ. It is my opinion that some of the reasons stated above will help to explain why Paul could write in the same context: "For I decided to know *nothing* among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (italics added) (2:2). On the other hand, as stated above, Paul, and the other writers of the New Testament who dealt with this theme in any detail, always discussed the Cross and Resurrection together, almost as one event, just as they saw a oneness in the reconciling and saving works of God in Christ.

But our chief concern in this closing chapter of the book shall be to analyze the reconciling and saving process of God in the Christ-Spirit in relation to man's spiritual and moral needs, in other words,



to show how man's response to God in Christ involves a cross and resurrection experience for him. If this proves to be a "theory of the Atonement," it is that because it is an attempt to state not only God's part in the process but man's response as well. The traditional "theories of the Cross" usually failed precisely at this point, in that they failed to show how man himself was involved in the Cross-Resurrection Event. We are concerned here in showing how both "external history" and "internal history" (H. Richard Niebuhr) meet in the reconciling and saving works of God in the Cross-Resurrection Event, which is at one and the same time (existentially) an external Event (God's work) and an internal event (man's response). The dialectical tension and movement between Cross and Resurrection will be observed throughout the following discussion, as these concepts are related to man's predicament and needs. This dialectical movement involving death and life, God and man, will be discussed below under the following headings: Reconciliation, Redemption, Forgiveness, Love, Faith, Self-Crucifixion, Hope, and Eternal Life. The essay will come to a close with a brief discussion of the Total Event.

### Reconciliation

It is doubtful whether the mutually inclusive tension of the Cross-Resurrection motif is presented with more clarity and force anywhere else in the New Testament than it is in Paul's letter to the Romans: "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, *much more* shall we be saved by *him* from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies ["against God"] we were *reconciled* to God by the death of his Son, *much more*, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by *his life*. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation" (italics added) (Romans 5:8-11). Paul plainly connects reconciliation with the Cross and salvation with the Resurrection. He also uses the expression "justified by his blood" in this connection. These two terms, "reconciliation" and "justification," are among Paul's favorites and apparently have much meaning in common for him. To be reconciled to God for Paul means to be at "peace" with God: "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with



God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Note that Paul here speaks of being "justified by faith" as being prerequisite to having peace with God. Reconciliation then apparently is related to justification as effect is related to cause, that is, *justification by faith* results in reconciliation (peace) with God. But how is this justifying reconciliation to be related to the Cross? How does the Cross justify and reconcile man to God? The attempt to answer these questions will have to be delayed for the moment.

A word more needs to be said concerning "justification." This is a term having a "legal" connotation, but it is clear that Paul does not use it strictly in this sense, because he connects it with "faith" and not with the "works" of the law. The word is based upon the root idea "to be right" (*dikē*), that is, to be "right" with the law, to be righteous, good, obedient to God's laws. To be justified in relation to God, then, means to be made right with God or to be at peace with God, to put it another way, as Paul does (Romans 5:1). This discussion should indicate how easily these ideas slip over into one another in the thinking of Paul. But, again, how does the Cross make man right with God? Should we think of it as a "legal transaction" or should we seek for another meaning of the idea of justification by faith in the blood of Christ? Karl Barth says: "The goal [of reconciliation and justification] is that man is transferred to another status in law. He no longer belongs to that which had a right over him, to that realm of curse, death and hell; he is translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. That means that his position, his condition, his *legal status* as a sinner is rejected in every form. *Man is no longer seriously regarded by God as a sinner*" (*italics added*).<sup>4</sup> To this writer, such a legalistic view of reconciliation by the Cross is sheer fiction. How can God ever cease taking man's sin seriously? Barth's thinking evidently lies in the traditional "theology of the Cross," discussed earlier in this essay, in which the Cross as such is regarded as the one event that reconciles God to man, or, in other words, changes God's mind regarding man by making him think of man as righteous even though man is not righteous. Such a view of reconciliation is far removed from the main current of New Testament thought, as we shall see later on.

In the same section of Romans, Paul uses another term which adds to the meaning of reconciliation. It is the term translated "acquittal"

<sup>4</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, p. 121.

(*dikaiōsis*), meaning the act or action of declaring one acquitted of a breach of the law and of setting the accused free, in other words, of liberating one from the penalty of the law. The theme of liberation (freedom) is a basic theme in the theology of Paul, and in the theology of all the New Testament authors for that matter. The stress then, as we shall see, is not merely upon God's act of *declaring* one acquitted, but rather upon the actual liberation of the condemned to walk in newness of life in a spiritual and moral freedom which God alone can bestow. The essential point to remember in all this is that God Himself is the One who is reconciling, justifying, and acquitting men through the blood of Christ.

But Paul does not consistently relate reconciliation and justification to the Cross of Christ. Just as often he connects justification, for example, with the Resurrection motif: "That is why his faith [Abraham's] was 'reckoned to him as righteousness.' But the words, 'it was reckoned to him,' were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and *raised for our justification*" (*italics added*) (Romans 4:22-25). Here Paul displays the difficulty he himself had in dealing with the idea that Abraham's "faith" was "reckoned to him as righteousness," but he finds a way out of the difficulty by associating justification with the Resurrection and not only with the Cross. How then should we interpret Paul at this point? It seems that there is only one conclusion that we can draw: the reconciling, justifying, and acquitting work of God in Christ is accomplished through the Christ who died *and* who rose again from the dead. In short, it is the Person of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ who works to reconcile man to God. If one were to stop with the Cross, he would certainly not be following Paul in this matter.

Another passage of importance reads thus: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1-4). Here Paul speaks of "condemnation" or "judgment" as though he were a lawyer arguing



that the law must be satisfied at all costs and that the guilty be punished in due regard for the unbending law. But such is not the case. Paul's use of legal "terms" may be misleading to the interpreter, if the interpreter himself is a legalist in his thinking. But even though Paul uses legal terms, he does not interpret them legally. This passage shows plainly that those who are being freed (reconciled, justified, acquitted) are "in Christ Jesus." Note that Paul puts "Christ" before "Jesus" in this sentence. This means that he was thinking of the Risen Christ operating in the Spirit, rather than of "Jesus" reconciling God to man on the Cross by appeasing God's wrath and satisfying God's legal demands upon man.

Paul's approach is the opposite from this (traditional) view. God is the One who is doing the reconciling work, and, in this passage, Paul clearly states that the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus is the One who is setting men free from the law of sin and death. It is to be noted with care that Paul sees two "laws" at work here: (1) the law of sin and death, and (2) the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus. The first "law" operates to destroy men; the second operates to save them. The first enslaves, the second frees; the first leads to spiritual death and destruction; the second leads to acquittal and life for all men of faith. The dialectic Paul presents here is not that of a mutually inclusive tension; it is that of mutually exclusive opposition. It is either-or and not both-and. If man yields himself to the law of sin and death, he will eventually destroy himself at the end of the process. But if he will submit himself in faith to the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, he will be reconciled to God and find peace and freedom. To Paul, this is the way the "law is fulfilled": it is "*fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*" (italics added) (Romans 8:4). The dialectic, however, is viewed elsewhere as a *mutually inclusive tension between death and life*; but the discussion of this "dialectic of salvation" will have to be delayed for the moment.

A glance at one other passage should suffice to indicate that the Resurrection was an integral hermeneutical element in Paul's understanding of reconciliation, justification, and so on. He writes to the Corinthians: "And such were some of you [unrighteous and outside the Kingdom of God]. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (I Corinthians 6:11). To understand Paul's use of the



term "name" in this passage, one must consider his Hebrew lineage. The Hebrews commonly referred to God as *the Name* to avoid using the personal name for God, *Jahweh*. By speaking of Him as the Name they could avoid undue familiarity with the Holy God of Israel and at the same time indicate that they were thinking of Him in terms of all His qualities, powers, and actions. It was an all-inclusive term that they could use to sum up all God's excellencies without the danger of overlooking any in statement (compare Ezra 6:12; Nehemiah 1:9; Matthew 6:9; John 1:12, and so on). Likewise the authors of the New Testament sometimes used this expression with reference to Jesus the Christ. By this device they could include all the excellencies, powers, qualities, and activities associated with the Person of Jesus the Christ. By relating justification to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul was, in typical Hebrew fashion, saying in effect that spiritual cleansing (washing), sanctification, and justification are to be understood in the light of all that the titles "Lord Jesus Christ" stand for. We have already discussed the significance of Paul's frequent use of these three titles in this order (with some variation) in order to assert the all-inclusive nature of God's working in Jesus the Christ. If this is true, then we need to understand Paul to be saying that justification is a process initiated and carried on by the Lord Jesus Christ, who, as God, came into the world, died, rose again from the dead, and now works to reconcile men to God and to save them from their sins.

### Redemption

The theme of redemption is a fundamental theme of the New Testament faith. To redeem means to "buy back" or to "reclaim," such as a person bought back from slavery or a piece of property reclaimed from foreign ownership. In other words, the fundamental idea of redemption was "deliverance," especially deliverance from bondage, such as the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, and so on. Jesus, for example, spoke of the giving of his life as a ransom for the many (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45), and the ransom idea appears in a few other places in the New Testament (1 Timothy 2:6; 1 Peter 1:18). Here again the essential meaning is deliverance. In his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks of redemption through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7), and in Galatians he speaks of Christ's re-



deeming men from the curse of the law and connects the redemption of those under the law with a reference to the Cross: "Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree" (Galatians 3:13). This is a difficult passage and has elicited no end of discussion, to which this present discussion must be added. First it needs to be noted that Paul did not say that Christ on the tree (Cross) redeems men from the curse of God or that Christ on the tree was *cursed of God*, but rather he says that Christ redeems men from the curse of the law. The question is: What is this curse of the law? Perhaps another passage in Galatians will help us at this point: "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, *born of woman, born under the law*, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (italics added) (4:4, 5).

Perhaps Paul means by the "curse of the law" little more than Jesus' involvement in human life and subjection to the laws of God for man. In other words, the phrase "curse of the law" may have been Paul's way of speaking of the Incarnation, as far as Jesus and his Cross were concerned. He surely was not saying that Jesus had broken the law and therefore was under the curse of the law. But as far as sinful men were concerned, Paul spoke often of the "wrath of God," that is, the inevitable working out of the law of sin and death in the persons who set themselves against God (compare Romans 1:18-32; 5:9). These are they who are "under the curse of the law" or under the "wrath of God." And these are they whom the Son of God came into the world to redeem or to deliver by his blood (Ephesians 1:7) or by the giving of his life for them (Matthew 20:28). But we ask, with impatience perhaps, how does the blood of Christ deliver sinful man from the wrath of God? Again we shall have to say: Let us wait till later on in our discussion.

On the other hand, how do the writers of the New Testament connect the idea of redemption (deliverance) with the Resurrection motif? An example from Ephesians may help at this point. Paul writes: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. . . . In him we have redemption through his blood . . ." (italics added) (1:3, 7). Note carefully that, even though Paul speaks of redemption through the blood, without explanation, he does so within the larger context of God's working in the Lord Jesus Christ. This

means, I take it, that the Cross is effective for redemption (deliverance) only because the Risen Christ-Spirit is now working in human history to reenact the Cross in the lives of men of faith. This line of thought becomes even more convincing when one reads on in Ephesians (1:11-2:10), but for the moment we shall have to postpone our discussion of this passage to a later point in this chapter.

### Forgiveness

We recall, as we center our attention on the word "forgiveness," that Jesus himself, at the Last Supper, spoke of forgiveness in connection with his blood to be poured out. But it was pointed out earlier that Jesus offered no explanation at that point as to how forgiveness would be affected through his blood. In fact, most of the teachings of Jesus on forgiveness as recorded in the Gospels had no connection at all with blood. Jesus taught that anyone seeking forgiveness in humility and sincerity could experience the forgiveness of God. He always taught that the forgiveness of God was spontaneous and direct to anyone seeking pardon for wrongs committed. He always stressed that God's only "demand" was that He be permitted to "give" to those who would come in repentance and humility to His "throne of grace." However, he did not picture God as a passive pouting potentate who waits for repentant subjects to come crawling before Him begging for forgiveness; rather, he pictured God as the heavenly Father who comes to sinful man, seeking him out and offering forgiveness to him. In other words, God's forgiveness is not "demand" but "gift." God's forgiveness is a liberating and creating power offered to men of faith. God's forgiveness cannot be bought; it can only be experienced through faith and love.

This is the marvelous lesson we derive from the story of Jesus and the fallen woman in the home of Simon the Pharisee. Jesus had gone to eat in the home of Simon. While they were eating, a fallen woman anointed the feet of Jesus with precious ointment and wept upon his feet, drying them with the hair of her head. Simon questioned to himself whether Jesus was truly a prophet, since he did not drive away this woman who was a sinner. Jesus, sensing Simon's reaction, said to him: "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii,



and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more" (Luke 7:41-43). Simon had given the "right answer," but he still was far from understanding what Jesus was driving at. The contrast between Simon and this woman was great. Simon was a self-righteous Pharisee who thought of forgiveness in terms of "how much." This is why he could give the "right answer," even though he really did not understand what Jesus was attempting to teach him about forgiveness. Simon would never have forgiven this woman without her first submitting herself to all the demands of the law. He would have considered her touch unclean and to be avoided; but Jesus permitted her to touch his feet. Simon was puzzled and perhaps a little annoyed that Jesus had accepted the woman's caresses, little understanding the nature of Jesus' response to the woman's touch.

Unaware of the deeper levels of human emotion and needs, Simon the legalist had a lesson to learn about forgiveness and a gentle rebuke to ponder. Turning toward the woman Jesus said to Simon: "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, *for she loved much*; but he who is forgiven *little, loves little*" (italics added) (Luke 7:44-47). Jesus of course was here dealing with the essential relationship between forgiveness and love. Just as love cannot be bought, so forgiveness cannot be bought. The woman was not buying Jesus' forgiveness, but rather responding to a love for her she already sensed in Jesus himself. She was attracted to Jesus because Jesus already had accepted her. He had come to seek and to save the lost. But her love was real too. Perhaps for the first time in her life she had met a man who loved her not for what she was but for what she *should have been and could be*, a woman made pure by the loving and creating forgiveness of God. "Your sins are forgiven. . . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace," said Jesus to the woman. This in substance is what God in grace does for and says to every person who comes in love and humility to Him. One finds God

already accepting him, just as the woman found Jesus already accepting her.

If this is the nature of forgiveness, how are we to understand what Paul means when he says (echoing Jesus) that men are forgiven of their trespasses through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7)? Is he saying that the blood purchases man's forgiveness? If so, then forgiveness must be bought; but if it is bought it is no longer forgiveness. Paul, however, never remotely suggests this. In fact, Paul can discuss forgiveness without connecting it directly with the blood of Christ. In the parallel passage in Colossians, Paul writes: "He [God] has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (*italics added*) (Colossians 1:13, 14). Note that Paul writes "*in whom we have . . . the forgiveness of sins.*" Next, he moves into that magnificent passage in which he extols almost in hymn-like fashion the Person of the Risen Christ, the "first-born from the dead" who is "preëminent" in everything, and in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell," and through whom God is *reconciling all things to himself*, whether on earth or in heaven (Colossians 1:15-20). The Christ he sees here through the eye of faith is the Risen Cosmic Christ who is eternally busy reconciling *all things unto God for God*. At the very close of his majestic paean, Paul refers to Christ's "making peace by the blood of his cross," but he makes no attempt at this point to explain how the blood of Christ makes peace. In the three verses which follow this statement he does give some light on the subject; but we must discuss this in another place in this chapter.

### Love

In at least three places, Paul writes of faith, hope, and love as a kind of trilogy of movement in the process of salvation (I Corinthians 13:13; Romans 5:1-5; Colossians 1:3, 4). It is evident that he considers faith, hope, and love as absolutely fundamental divine and human relationships and/or realities involved in the reconciling and saving working of God in Christ. All three are mutually inclusive and have to do with various aspects of man's response and life in fellowship with God through the Christ-Spirit. Sometimes Paul, and other writers, speak of



them separately (compare Romans 8:24, 25; 15:13; II Corinthians 5:14; Ephesians 2:8, and so on), but they are not separated in their thinking, for almost invariably all three will be found in the larger context where one or the other is mentioned. For the most part the rest of this section will deal with these three concepts in an effort to show how they are bound up in the Cross-Resurrection motif in the New Testament.

The Christian faith begins and ends with the astounding declaration: "God is Love." God is a reconciling and saving God because He is love. God's love is expressed in His grace and His grace is the ground of man's salvation. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8). "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ . . ." (Ephesians 2:4, 5).

God's love is expressed in His outgoing concern for all men. His love includes all men. His love works for the well-being and good of all men, even when men turn against Him and attempt to thwart His love. When men thus turn against Him the *judging quality* of His love appears. God's love is not a soft, indulgent, sentimental love which overlooks human rebellion and sin, but rather a love that resists evil by overcoming it. Evil is dealt with seriously by God. The Cross itself is indicative of God's great love for man, for in the Cross God reveals His all-embracing love for man and declares that man is accepted in spite of his sin, and will be forgiven if he is willing and able to be forgiven. "While we were yet *helpless*, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet *sinner*s Christ died for us" (*italics added*) (Romans 5:6, 8).

The words "yet *helpless*" and "yet *sinner*s" describe man's existential predicament and estrangement from God. As "*helpless*" he cannot help himself, for his plight is not of his own doing, and not of God's doing; rather, it is the result of his existential predicament, his involvement in finitude which of necessity separates him from God. But the words "yet *sinner*s" describe man's existential estrangement understood as man's active and willful rebellion against God which ultimately will result in his own destruction. Thus man's helplessness is understood as being the primary reason why God comes to man in

love in the Cross. This is the reason why God acts "apart from law" on the basis of his "righteousness" (active loving justice) to deliver man from his existential predicament and estrangement. "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it," writes Paul, "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus [Christ]" (Romans 3:21-26).

Here, surely, we have the heart of Paul's thinking concerning the love which God has expressed in the Cross. God acts *apart from the law* in loving justice to rescue helpless man who otherwise would ultimately perish in his own anxious finitude. Because of God's image in him, man in his finitude seeks to elevate himself to the point where he thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think. He comes to think that he is a god and not a man, or he even comes to think of himself as God. And by thus denying his own finitude, man opens the floodgates of the "demonic" or the illimitable stretches of "non-being." He faces this awful chasm or abyss or "death" with fear and anxiety. By denying his own finitude he progressively destroys his finitude and then must face the threat of non-being, or the threat of *that* being prior to *this* being from whence he came. The threat of "beinglessness" constitutes the ground of man's existential anxiety, and, unless God's love comes in to rescue him or hold him up and away from this chasm, he will perish in his anxiety. This, I take it, is something like what Paul means by man's falling short of the glory of God. And since men are *falling short* of God's glory, they are ever falling toward the "beinglessness" of their extinction. Only by God's free gift of grace and love in Christ can they be rescued from that sure fate.

Paul uses a term in the passage last quoted from Romans (3:21-26) which further illustrates how the loving mercy of God is declared in the Cross of Christ. It is the term translated "expiation" and means literally "place" or "seat of mercy." Within the Holy of holies in the Jewish temple the ark of the covenant was placed. Once a year on



the "day of atonement" the high priest would go into the Holy of holies and sprinkle the "mercy seat" of the ark of the covenant with the blood of the sacrificial animal as an offering to God in behalf of the people whose sins were being confessed in the sacrificial offering. The mercy seat was regarded as being the place where God was present with His people and where the people could meet Him through the high priest who alone could go into the Holy of holies to represent the people. How is this related to the blood of Christ? we may ask. Only in the following sense perhaps. Paul saw in the mercy seat sprinkled with the blood of the animal a provision which God had made in His mercy to the people. By bringing the blood of the animal to the mercy seat the people were thus symbolically confessing their sins before a holy, just, and merciful God. Because God met His people at the "place of mercy" the people went away from the sacrifice assured that they had been forgiven. Regardless of what we make of the sacrifices of the Hebrews, it is at least evident that they regarded God as basically just and merciful, even though at times they evidently entertained low views of His justice. It was the "place of mercy" idea that appealed to Paul in this connection. To him the death of Christ was not a sacrifice designed to appease an angry God, but rather an evidence of the "place of mercy" God Himself had provided in Jesus the Christ who died on the Cross. It was God who was showing forth His love in the Christ of the Cross; Paul never permits his readers to get any other picture in their minds (Romans 5:8).

If God's love is revealed in the Cross of Christ, how then are men to enter into this love, or, in other words, to confess their sins in the blood of Christ, as the Hebrew people confessed their sins in the blood of the animal sprinkled on the "mercy seat"? Significantly enough, the writers of the New Testament never ask men to have faith in the Cross as such or to believe in Jesus' blood *itself* as efficacious in behalf of their sins. Paul may appear to be saying this, when he writes of God's gift "through the redemption which is in *Christ Jesus, whom* God put forward as an expiation by his blood, *to be received by faith*" (italics added) (Romans 3:24, 25); but it needs to be observed that Paul said "whom" God "put forward" as an expiation by his blood. What they were to receive by faith was not the "blood" but the "putting forward" of God. It was God's act which they were to believe in. It was in the Christ who willingly and lovingly laid down his life for



them, thus manifesting the love of the Father in himself, that they were to believe.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul gives us an exquisite passage on the Christ of the Cross. He appeals to the Philippians to have the same mind of love in them which Christ had in humbly submitting himself to the death on the Cross. His selfless act of love should be for them an "incentive of love" in dealing with one another. The central point is that sacrificial love is the keynote in this passage. But Paul does not and cannot stop at the Cross. He writes: "And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:8-11).

The point we are interested in here is that Paul provides us a clue to enable us to understand how the love of God expressed in the Cross awakens faith (and love) in the believer. Does one merely decide to believe in the love of God expressed in the Cross? The answer must be No. The clue to the answer we are seeking lies in the two words "name" and "confess." We have already asserted that the word "name" was often used in an all-inclusive sense to denote the sum total of the attributes, powers, actions, and revelations of God, or of any other person as well. To "confess" the "name" of Jesus meant much more than merely stating the name "Jesus" itself, or much more than referring to the sum total of all that "Jesus" did in the flesh, including the giving up of his life on the Cross. Rather, the point which Paul is making here is that the "name" of Jesus stands for the sum total of the work of Jesus Christ who is Lord, who is highly exalted on his throne, yet who is revealingly present among men, enabling them to confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father. We say "revealingly present among men" because the word "name," as so used by the Hebrews, makes this view possible.

On making the confession "Jesus Christ is Lord," Paul writes thus in another letter: ". . . I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). This is an illuminating statement and should help us to grasp more fully



the Resurrection faith of Paul. Without the Resurrection there would have been no confession of Jesus as Lord. Paul himself would never have become a Christian, if the Risen Christ had not met him on the road to Damascus. How does one make this confession? Not by confessing that Jesus died on the Cross, or by confessing any event in the life of Jesus, but by confessing "Jesus is Lord" to the glory of God the Father *through* and as a result of the working of the Holy Spirit who is the Risen Lord (II Corinthians 3:17, 18).

We need but recall Peter's way of accounting for man's confession of faith in Christ: "You have been born anew, not of perishable seed [earthly, finite things] but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God" (I Peter 1:23). The Living Word, Christ himself, enables men to confess "Jesus is Lord" and be born anew or from above. "*Through him* [who ransoms with his precious blood] you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" (italics added) (I Peter 1:18-21). Note that it is not through the "precious blood of Christ" that one comes to believe in God, but rather through *him* who rose from the dead and who returns to the earth in the Living Word-Spirit. Peter certainly is not underrating the Cross in this epistle, but it is evident that to him the Cross is powerless to reconcile and to save men apart from the Ever-Present Living Word who is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. We may say that Peter's "theory" of the Cross may be summed up in his statement: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, *that we might die* [Cross] *to sin and live* [Resurrection] *to righteousness*. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls" (italics added) (I Peter 2:24, 25). How will men be able to "die to sin" and "live to righteousness"? It will be through the working of him who is the Shepherd (compare John 10:11-18, 25-30) and Guardian of their souls, according to Peter.

### Faith

Man's response to God's love revealed in the Cross and Resurrection is the response of faith. We have observed already that man's faith takes the form of a confession that Jesus Christ is Lord, prompted by the working of God Himself in the Christ-Word-Spirit. We have in-

sisted that man's faith is not to rest on any event of the Incarnation as such (that is, Jesus' teachings, miracles, Cross, and so on), but rather is to rest in Christ, the Risen Person. He is the One who enables man to have faith in God which in turn enables God to perform His reconciling and saving works in man.

The impression may be got from the above discussion that man's faith is entirely the work of God. It is true that there would be no faith in man without the prior work of God, that is, unless God takes the initiative, but this is not to deny that man himself must exercise faith for himself. All the writers of the Scriptures assume and assert that man must have faith in God to live. He is admonished with strong appeals to have faith in God or perish. All these appeals would be pointless, if man of himself could not have faith in God.

What is faith? Paul Tillich offers a striking definition: "Faith is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern. . . . It is, in biblical terminology, the divine Spirit working in our spirit which creates faith. Such a concept of faith has little to do with the popular concepts of faith as the belief in something unbelievable, as the subjection to an authority in which we trust, or as the risk of accepting something as highly probable but not certain. . . . Faith, in the biblical view, is an act of the whole personality. Will, knowledge, and emotion participate in it. It is an act of self-surrender, of obedience, of assent. Each of these elements must be present."<sup>5</sup>

It would be difficult, it seems to me, to improve on this conception of faith. Faith, in Biblical terms, is certainly not mental assent to doctrinal propositions (creeds) or uncritical submission to a historical "authority" (Church, hierarchy, preacher, Scriptures, and so on) as such. Faith, as Tillich puts it, is "the state of being grasped." Grasped by what? we may ask. First of all, we reply, being grasped by God Himself as He works in the Christ-Spirit. In the midst of man's existential predicament and estrangement the divine Spirit of God is at work creating faith in man who responds in faith. Man's faith-response is a commitment, a giving of himself into the keeping of the divine Christ-Spirit. Man yields himself to the "everlasting arms of God" and finds that Rest for which Augustine long ago yearned: "O Lord our souls are restless until they find their rest in Thee!" Man

<sup>5</sup> Paul Tillich, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality*, pp. 51, 52, 53.



cannot avoid faith in God, except at his own peril. Faith is an "ontological" (and "epistemological") element in man's existential predicament. Man as a spirit-person must have faith; it is a "forced option" which he cannot avoid. If he attempts to avoid it, he simply shifts his faith to another object. If he refuses to decide, he decides to refuse, which is an act of faith. In other words, man must believe in something. We are not talking about mental belief at this point, although mental belief is part of the active response of faith in God. Man must choose, since he is a free, moral, and spiritual person who knows himself to be a person and who knows himself to be a sinner against God, involved in the existential predicament and in estrangement from God or from Being-Itself (Paul Tillich).

When man refuses to believe in God, that is, refuses to commit himself in love and obedience to God, he attempts the impossible possibility. It is impossible for him to exist without faith, but it is also possible for him not to have faith in God as "Object" because of his moral, intellectual, and spiritual freedom, that is, because he is a creature in whose hands God has placed the power of life and death. He may live or he may die (spiritually); he may be saved or he may destroy himself; he may reject God or he may affirm Him and share in the New Life (New Being: Tillich) which God makes available in the Christ-Spirit. Man may cut himself off from the Source of Life, not because he does not have faith (for he must have), but because he has the *wrong faith* or faith wrongly directed.

If we may use the simile, man may become like the flower which is pulled from the ground. Its roots being separated from its Source of Life, it will die. It cannot live within its own power. It does not have life *in itself*. Man too does not have life in himself. His life is bound up with all the forces and elements which surround him and are in him. He is *involved* in the processes of life, yet he does not have life *in himself*. For life he must look beyond himself. If he severs himself (like the flower) from the Source of Life itself, he must die, that is, he must cease to exist qua man. The flower separated from the soil "lives" on in other elements and forms but it no longer exists qua flower. So does man. If he refuses "to the end" to believe in God, the Source of Life, he will be transformed by "death" from "being qua man" into "being qua *something else*," and he shudders at the thought (anxiety) of this "something else," because he is made in the "image



of God" and "for God." This, I take it, is what the Bible is really saying, even though its terminology is greatly different from the above.

We have said that God's love manifested in the Cross (Romans 5:8) calls for a response of faith on man's part. How does man respond in faith to the self-giving and creating love of God revealed in the Cross? Without the Resurrection man would never have "discovered" the love of God operating in the Cross of Christ. Paul writes: ". . . if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (I Corinthians 15:14, 17). At this point we have reached the very essence of the theme of this book. We have labored to show that no historical event as such in the life of Jesus, not even *the historical event* of the Resurrection as such, provides the ground of man's reconciliation and salvation. We have argued that faith in Jesus of Nazareth, or in the Cross event, or in the Resurrection event, is a faith that is empty or vain. It is empty or vain because it is *man's faith alone*. When man qua man is asked to believe for salvation in a person who once lived or in an event that once happened, his faith becomes intellectual assent or adherence to tradition, or, what is worse, an acceptance of the "authoritative" teachings of popes, bishops, and preachers (peddlers) of the message. His faith, then, is a purely horizontal, secondhand faith, that is, a faith handed down to him from his predecessors, a "faith once for all delivered to the saints," which he must defend in its *status quo*.

There is much more of this kind of "faith" among Christians than many are willing to admit. For one thing, many Christians are unaware that their "faith" is such a secondhand faith, and not a firsthand faith in the Living Christ which is in turn sustained by him. A faith that must look to historical events, things, institutions, or persons for its foundations is a precarious faith indeed, for things historical change, that is, they are relative, and leave faith with shifting foundations; but the Living Word of God which "abides forever" is faith's sure foundation. This surely is what Paul is implying when he writes that "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."

The problem of sin is man's greatest problem. Because of sin in his life he is guilty before God, and condemned. This, in other



language, means that sin is a destructive or destroying state in which man finds himself at birth and which destroys him in his helpless yielding to it. But *precisely because man is helpless* in dealing with the sin problem, God has come to man in the Cross and Resurrection to deliver him from sin. If man could solve all his problems, including the sin problem, by and within himself, there would be no need for God to enter man's unhappy state in his behalf. But God through the Scriptures reveals what human experience confirms, that God has indeed come in the Christ-Spirit to rescue fallen man from despair and destruction. This is the theme of the Christian faith.

But, again we raise the question: What is the ground of man's deliverance from sin? Many, as we have seen, have formulated "theologies of the Cross" wherein they have asserted that the Cross was the place where man's sin problem was settled, that is, the place where the burden of human sin and guilt was borne by Jesus, thus making it possible for God, whose "honor," "justice," or "government" had been offended, to pardon man and deliver him from the clutches of Satan. According to this view, the crucified Jesus was regarded as man's substitute or as man's sin bearer, taking man's place so that God's wrath would fall on him rather than on sinful man. Theories of the Cross have been varied and intricate, but all have one thing in common. They all imply that it was "at the Cross" that the ransom price was paid to satisfy an offended God and thus earn for man the forgiveness and deliverance for which he longed.

Needless to say, this highly scholastic and legal approach to the doctrines of reconciliation and salvation (that is, the Atonement) is utterly out of keeping with the teachings of the New Testament. True, there are "proof texts" here and there that may seem to support such theories of the Cross, but the main line of the New Testament message lies altogether in another context of ideas, such as we are now trying, however poorly, to trace and state. Paul's statement, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are *still in your sins*" (*italics added*), makes any "theory of the Cross" as such an arbitrary and meaningless perversion of the Christian faith, which is not a Cross faith only, but a Resurrection faith as well. If we take Paul seriously in this statement, and we should in the light of his Resurrection-centered faith, we can never agree that man's sin problem was *settled* at the Cross, for if it had not been for the Resurrec-



tion, according to Paul and all the rest of the New Testament writers, the sin problem would not have been provided for by the Cross or by any other action or event connected with the Incarnation per se. Actually, however, when we say that Paul's faith was a Resurrection-centered faith, we do not mean to say that Paul did not recognize the vital place and function of the Cross of Christ. We would be entirely wrong to interpret Paul thus. The Cross does play a significant role in his theology, as we shall see, but—and this is our main contention—the Cross has no power or meaning for Paul apart from the Resurrection. We should say, then, that Paul's theology is a Cross-Resurrection theology, for both are vital to his understanding of the Christian faith.

Paul's belief that the Resurrection is basic for man's faith is further exemplified in a passage in Romans: "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because, if you confess, with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. . . . For, 'every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved' " (italics added) (10:8, 9, 13). In this particular passage the Cross is not even mentioned, which shows that Paul does not connect faith with the Cross as such. But does he not connect faith in this passage with the Resurrection as a historical event as such? The answer is: Yes and No. He does demand a belief in the Resurrection as an event, but he goes far beyond this. He asks men to confess that "Jesus is Lord" because of the Resurrection, for anyone calling on the "name" of the Lord will be saved. In other words, Paul is asking his readers to confess faith in the One whom God raised from the dead and who is now present with them in all his functions and powers, as the word "name" indicates. Paul doubtless is here thinking about an I-Thou (personal) encounter between men and God through the Risen Christ-Spirit. He surely is not saying that a mere intellectual assent to the "doctrine" of the Resurrection will result in salvation.

Earlier we stated that God's Love revealed in the Cross seeks a faith-response from man and that the faith-response is due to the working of God Himself in the Risen Christ-Word-Spirit. Now we want to go a step further and attempt to explain how the *faith* which is inspired by the Risen Christ-Word-Spirit becomes also an expression of man's love in response to God's Love revealed in the Cross. In



other words, it is the Resurrection again that provides the clue for our understanding of this response. Faith in God, we argue, must be understood to involve love for God if the reconciling and saving quality of faith is to be grasped by the mind. Faith in God of necessity must involve man's will (commitment) and man's intellect to some extent, but faith would be poverty-stricken indeed without love. If faith without works is dead, faith without love is empty and sterile. Man cannot have faith in a God he cannot love; but, since God is Love (I John 4:8), man's faith must include the deepest and most searching love that man is able to express or understand. If it is God's Love in the Cross that wins us, it is God's Love reaching us through our faith that changes our faith into a love that we will not surrender, because that Love will not let us go. Jesus expressed the essence of man's relationship with God as being based upon the Law of Love which is above all law, when he said: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40; compare Deuteronomy 6:5; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8).

One who reads the Scriptures is immediately struck with the great emphasis placed upon the "incentive of love" which arises out of the contemplation of the Cross. Paul's passage in Philippians is a classic: "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any *incentive of love*, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having *the same love*, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (*italics added*) (Philippians 2:1-8). No reader should miss the challenge and the power of such words. They express the depths of Paul's faith. Not only is his "theory" of the Cross implied here;



but the foundations of his Christian ethic are likewise revealed here. Why should we love our neighbor and do good to him? is the question which Paul raises and answers here. Since God Himself through Christ loves man so much that He expressed it in the "humiliation" of the Cross, man should be moved to respond in loving praise and worship to God ("to the glory of God the Father") and in loving service to his fellow man.

There is one book in the New Testament that is almost entirely devoted to the theme of love. This book is I John. John writes: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. . . . We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. *He who does not love remains in death.* . . . By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. . . . Beloved, let us love one another; *for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.* He who does not love does not know God; *for God is love.* In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, *not that we loved God but that he loved us* and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also *ought to love one another.* No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us" (italics added) (3:1, 14, 16; 4:7-12).

In my opinion, no greater lines have ever been penned by a mortal man. It is not difficult to believe that this man was moved by the Holy Spirit when these words were formed in his mind. Such words as the following should shock us into the realization that Christianity is a faith of love, and when it is less than this it is not faith and not Christian: "He who does not love remains in death." "We may say, then, that the essence of salvation in Christianity is the power to love, that this power is not naturally present in man as he is, but that it is obtained by a living relationship to God," writes William A. Spurrer. "God is love and an experience of God means that this love operates in and through man. . . . God loves man and gives him the power to love. Salvation is a rescue from a loveless life. If we are correct in defining salvation in this way, then it should be apparent why conversion is not a quick once-and-for-all affair. The power to love is not something that is achieved overnight. It is a long and gradual growth.



And because love is dynamic and spontaneous, there is no static level of perfection."<sup>6</sup>

The Scripture passages we have just considered in Philippians and I John and the quotation given immediately above force us at this point to give attention to two important implications of the Resurrection faith for the doctrine of salvation. The first has to do with the nature (structure?) of the salvation a given man receives through Christ. Often salvation has been understood in legalistic and static terms, that is, as the granting of a new legal status guaranteeing one entrance into the benefits of heaven upon death, and as the giving of a new nature (soul) complete in an instant, waiting only for the final journey of the soul into heaven without the body. Such a view of salvation undoubtedly amounts to a distortion of the Christian faith. On the other hand, the New Testament writers devoted much time and effort to make it clear that salvation was a dynamic process, having a beginning in faith to be sure, but at the same time a process going on as a result of a living and loving, personal fellowship between God and man, the believing lover. This means, in other words, that the believing lover is not completely saved at any one time, but that he is *being saved*.

The New Testament makes this clear in many places, both by explicit declaration and by implication (compare Colossians 3:10; Matthew 7:13, 14; 10:22; 24:13; Luke 8:4-15; I Timothy 1:15; II Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:11-16; 6:1-12; Luke 13:23, 24; John 10:16; 12:32, and so on). Certain scriptures stressing the process aspect of salvation are so revealing that this writer cannot refrain from citing them: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, *beholding* the glory of the Lord, are *being changed* [*metamorphoumetha*: being transformed, metamorphosed] into his likeness [image] *from one degree of glory to another*; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (italics added) (II Corinthians 3:17, 18). "So put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander. Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, *that by it you may grow up to salvation*; for you have *tasted* the kindness of the Lord" (italics added) (I Peter 2:1-3). Perhaps one of the causes for the widespread legal and static view of salvation among Christians today may be the Authorized

<sup>6</sup> Spurrier, *Guide to the Christian Faith*, p. 211.



(King James) Version of the Bible. Perhaps its pronounced Calvinistic bent would account for its tendency to view salvation in transactional and static terms. The passage in II Corinthians (3:17, 18) is a case in point, for there the Authorized Version reads "are changed" instead of "being changed." Evidently it was difficult for the Calvinistic translators to think of one's growing up to salvation.

Professor Wayne E. Oates has recently published a book that should be carefully considered by anyone wishing to go more deeply into the question of the nature of salvation, particularly as salvation relates to all the dimensions of personality, or, in other words, to the whole man in his total environment. Salvation does not and cannot take place in a vacuum. It is a multidimensional process involving all the dimensions and processes of human personality and life. Man is a "becoming" creature. If he is a Christian he is becoming a Christian and not a Christian in a fixed and final (complete) sense. Anyone claiming to be a Christian does not understand the nature of Christian salvation.

In his excellent book, Professor Oates discusses what he calls "goals of becoming." These are real goals, but of course they are never completely realized. He labels them: (1) meaningfulness, (2) direction, (3) balance, (4) community, (5) maturity-in-love, and (6) integration. These are somewhat analogous to "stages along life's way" in Søren Kierkegaard's writings. In the process of salvation one does not necessarily move from the first to the second, and so on. But these are essential aspects of the Christian's pilgrimage, and one will do well to take them seriously. Salvation is no easy way to travel, as Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* shows. "His book," writes Oates, "outlines the ten stages of the Christian's pilgrimage from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City [like Dante's journey from the Inferno, through Purgatory, and into Paradise]. The Christian life is portrayed, not as a static realization of a transactional type of salvation, but as a jagged and uneven, but forward moving, development from one level of spiritual achievement to another through temptation. Spurts of progress are often met by doldrums of despair, indifference, and vanity."<sup>7</sup> How true this is in every Christian's life!

The second important implication of the Resurrection faith for the

<sup>7</sup> Wayne E. Oates, *The Religious Dimensions of Personality* (New York, Associated Press, 1957), p. 146.



doctrine of salvation has to do with the communal aspect of salvation. Man is not reconciled and saved in a vacuum, but within community. His life is bound up at all points with the lives of his neighbors. This is why the authors of the Scriptures write so much about one's relationships with and duties toward his neighbor. If one does not love God and his neighbor, his faith is dead, we are told (I John).

For this reason the Christian faith has found expression in a community, the Church. Within the community of faith, love is able to emerge, grow, and find expression. Only in this way does one "grow up to salvation." And the One at work within the person who is becoming a Christian is the Risen Lord Jesus Christ whose love controls him: "For the love of Christ controls us," writes Paul, "because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live *no longer for themselves* but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (*italics added*) (II Corinthians 5:14, 15). The Power at work within the believer is the Holy Spirit who pours God's love into man's heart (Romans 5:5) so that he can dwell with others in loving and creative unity and community. "Such a unity is not an abstract unity," writes John A. Mackay. "It is a community, a fellowship of human spirits who are united to God and to one another. What God wills, therefore, is not mere unity, but community. . . . The community which God wills is a fellowship of love, constituted not by an evolution in history, but by the intervention of God in history. It is a community constituted by Jesus Christ, who by what He was and did brought God and man and man and man together in love. . . . God's will to fellowship seeks a community of love, an order of life in which He would reign in every human heart and in every human relationship."<sup>8</sup>

That reconciliation and salvation are bound up with the community is a doctrine which many do not yet see, or do not want to see. Too long the doctrine of salvation was meaningful only in terms of the individual in isolation who was granted this marvelous boon to be enjoyed forever. Few have recognized the hidden selfishness in such a radically individualistic conception of salvation. Such a conception of salvation has often produced more Pharisees than Christians and more unwholesome social attitudes than wholesome ones. Many Christians are so content with their salvation that they cannot visualize

<sup>8</sup> Mackay, *God's Order*, p. 63.



the social implications and responsibilities of their faith. They do not see that the plight of their neighbors is *their* plight, and that the denial of freedom to their neighbor is a denial of their own freedom. Rugged individualism will account for the failure of many Christians today to work for the abolition of social evils (exploitation of races and minority groups) and to labor for the alleviation of human want and misery the world around caused by human greed, pride, and prejudice. Harry Emerson Fosdick stuns us with a quote from Lord Asquith: "The test of every civilization [Christian or not] is the point below which the weakest and most unfortunate are allowed to fall."<sup>9</sup>

We may fittingly close this section with two well-worded quotations: "The most adequate and accurate single way of describing the saving meaning of the event (or the saving 'work' of the person)," writes John Knox, "is by saying that God through Christ brought into existence a new people—a people in which He could be known, in *precisely the way He is known there*, as righteous love, as grace and truth, and could thus reconcile us to Himself. Such reconciliation with the God who made us and made us for Himself means also reconciliation within ourselves and between ourselves and others—the overcoming of all hostilities within and without. This reconciliation is salvation, and it has all the worth which the New Testament and the classics of Christian devotion are constantly ascribing to it: life abundant, joy unspeakable and full of glory, peace that passes all understanding, confidence and hope like an anchor firmly fixed. But this reconciliation is found within the community and in the nature of the case can be found only there."<sup>10</sup>

And Professor Frank Stagg avers: "Luke [for example, in Acts 2:41–47] significantly presents together this *koinōnia* and salvation. It is precisely in this Christian *koinōnia*, Christian community or fellowship, that personal salvation is consummated. Personality was once thought to be closed and exclusive, but it is now recognized to be open and inclusive. . . . The Greek idea of a soul as some separate entity is foreign to the Bible. In the Bible man is thought of as a whole; he is not viewed as *having* a soul, but as *being* a soul. It is only as man, a complex of interrelated factors, is drawn into a faith-

<sup>9</sup> Fosdick, *The Living of These Days*, p. 272.

<sup>10</sup> John Knox, *On the Meaning of Christ* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), p. 102. Selection rights now held by Harper & Brothers.



love relationship in Christ that he is saved. But a man in Christ is by that very fact also a part of the body of Christ. The kinship with Christ involves the kinship with all who are in Christ. It is in this relationship that one becomes truly a person and truly saved. Christ saves individuals but in saving them he makes them more than individuals; they become persons, living in this relationship."<sup>11</sup>

Such words of wisdom we will do well to ponder with care, for such a view of salvation has far-reaching implications as far as Christian theology and Christian social obligations are concerned. For example, how can I speak of my being-in-becoming a Christian if my neighbor likewise is not becoming a Christian? My salvation to some extent, therefore, is bound up with his.

### Self-Crucifixion

The reader will recall that earlier in this chapter many questions were raised, but no attempt at that point was made to answer them. For example, we asked *how* the Cross and Resurrection reconciled, justified, or delivered man from sin and death; we asked *how* forgiveness was related to the Cross as such; and we asked *how* God's love found lodgment in man's heart, resulting in his loving faith-response. We hope to supply partial answers to these queries in this section of the chapter.

In a sense we are at the very heart of the thesis of this book, for it is within the psycho-religious concept of self-crucifixion that we find the answer to the relationship between the Cross and the Resurrection in the Christian faith. For in the experience of self-crucifixion *man too dies and rises with Christ* into a creative and creating fellowship in the Spirit. It shall be our concern in this section to show how the New Testament deals with this theme and how man's life and hopes and destiny are bound up within it. "Careful attention to the responsive work of Cross-bearing [Matthew 16:24, 25, and so on] might have prevented the later doctrines that declare him [Christ] our 'substitute' in the wrong meaning of the phrase, namely, that we are relieved from all responsibility [in salvation]. He is our 'substitute' in that he does [for us] what we could never do by our own power, but it is a representative and inclusive 'substitution.' We must share in his work. This is implied in the biblical understanding of the cor-

<sup>11</sup> Stagg, *The Book of Acts*, p. 70.

porate nature of man. In other words, the very conception of Messiah presupposes a responsive Messianic band. An atoner presupposes a Church founded to be an atoning society."<sup>12</sup>

The above context of ideas should help us to look back and relate the concept of cross-bearing (self-crucifixion) to the communal aspect of reconciliation and salvation and to look forward to see how the principle of sharing with God and with others works in man the reconciling and saving grace and love of God. That is to say, the principle of sharing presupposes a community of sharers, and through the sharing community God works to reconcile the world to Himself through the Christ-Spirit.

In an earlier chapter in this essay we dealt with Jesus' "rationale" of the Cross (compare Matthew 16:24-26, and so on). We pointed out that even though Jesus did not specifically mention the Resurrection in this teaching, he at least implied the Resurrection when he said that one must *die to live*. After the Resurrection Jesus' followers understood what he at that time was talking about; therefore, we find them presenting this "die to live" theme over and over again in their own different and unique ways. We shall consider only a few of these passages simply to illustrate the Cross-Resurrection theme in the New Testament in relation to the reconciliation and salvation of men. "... when they [the New Testament authors] speak of the death of Christ and of His resurrection," writes Lesslie Newbigin, "they do not speak of them as things which are—so to speak—external to themselves, remote events of which they have merely heard a report. They speak of them as events in which *they themselves have shared*. 'I have been crucified with Christ.' 'All ye who were baptized were baptized into his death.' 'Ye are risen with Christ.' God 'has raised us up with Christ and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places.' However we are to explain this language, it certainly means this: that those who wrote it felt themselves to be so bound up with Him that what He had done had become their own, so that when they came before God they came, so to say, in the person of Christ—in His Name and as part of Him. . . . Everything that they have is His; *their very existence is 'in Christ'*" (*italics added*).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Wolf, *No Cross, No Crown*, p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Sin and Salvation* (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 93. Used by permission.



This comprehensive quotation will serve as a kind of summarizing introduction to that which is to follow.

Perhaps Paul's longest passage on the Cross-Resurrection theme appears in Romans: "Do you not know that all of us who have been *baptized into Christ Jesus* were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a *death like his*, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body [self, person] might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have *died with Christ*, we believe that we shall also *live with him*. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves *dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus*" (italics added) (Romans 6:3-11).

In my opinion, the above quotation represents the essence of Pauline theology on the doctrines of reconciliation and salvation. But he shows a little more clearly in an earlier passage how reconciliation and salvation are related to the events of the Cross and Resurrection: "Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation" (italics added) (Romans 5:9-11).

When these two passages are fused together, as they almost are in Romans, one gets an insight into the mind of Paul with regard to the fundamental ground of reconciliation and salvation (Cross-Resurrection) and the nature of man's faith and love response to God in what Paul calls the *crucifixion* and *resurrection* of the self or person. Obviously Paul has in mind certain volitional, intellectual, and emotional aspects of the living person, but he does not at any point spell this out for us in detail. He states in one form or another that man must humble himself (repent), have faith in God through Christ, and love



God even as God loves him, but this is about as far as Paul goes. He does have much to say about the quickening and transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who have died to self with or in Christ and have been raised with him. He views the Holy Spirit, for example, as the "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" who sets men "free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2).

To understand Paul's theology, one must recognize certain dialectical and paradoxical language constructions in his writings. The most conspicuous of these are phrased the "law of sin and death" (dialectical) and the "law of death and life" (paradoxical). This type of language probably represents Paul's version of Jesus' teaching that one must die to live. We may speak of Paul's "law of sin and death" in modern terms as man's existential predicament and estrangement, or, to use a well-known term among theologians, which has been rightly conceived but wrongly formulated, "original sin." Paul is aware of man's helpless predicament, his being caught within the law of sin and death, but he also knows that Christ, the crucified and risen Saviour, is he who delivers man from the law of sin and death. But man is no passive recipient of the saving works of Christ; rather, he must actively give himself in death by denying self in order to receive the life-giving grace and power of God through the Christ-Spirit. In other words, in loving faith he must say No to self and say Yes to God in the Spirit. By denying self and affirming God he discovers in this psycho-spiritual process that God through the Christ-Spirit is already at work within him enabling him to die to self and to rise to walk in newness of life.

How does one know that this is what is happening to him to deliver him from the law of sin and death? The answer is: by seeing what God has revealed and done in the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. In these two events God has pictured in awful and glorious drama what must also transpire within the heart and soul of every person, if he is to be delivered from the law of sin and death. The person must die to live through the loving and gracious power of God working through the Christ-Spirit, or, to use Paul's titles, through the *Lord Jesus Christ*. Perhaps this can be said in another way: that God lived in the Man of Galilee that men may know what it means to live in God, and that God now (as always) lives and works in the Cosmic Man, Christ, that men may live through faith. Paul's



language is classic on the theme of the New Life in Christ: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me. . . . But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God" (Galatians 2:20; 6:14-16).

In this last passage the words "new creation" could be translated "new creating," indicating a vital process going on in the believer as a result of his having been crucified to the world of sin and death. Though Paul does not specifically mention the "resurrection with Christ" in this particular passage, it is clearly implied in the "new creating process" being carried on in the believer by the Risen Christ. The reference to those who "walk by this rule [*kanon*]" further indicates a process going on according to a rule or "canon" (law). The rule or canon Paul has in mind surely must be the paradoxical "law of death and life," that is, the "law" of dying and rising with Christ, which must characterize the "orderly walk" of the person who participates in the (New) Israel of God or the Church.

Thus we see that Paul invariably keeps the Cross-Resurrection motif in the center of his thinking, even though at times it is difficult to detect the connection, because he sometimes, but rarely, separates them in a given argument. This perhaps can be explained in part by the existential nature of his writings. They were written to meet specific challenges or to supply given needs among the Christians with whom he labored and whom he served in the name of Christ. But it is surely safe to say that Paul's every thought on reconciliation and salvation was based on the Cross-Resurrection theme of death and life through and by the Living Presence of God in the Christ-Spirit. Any person, Paul held, young or old, rich or poor, Jew or Greek, without distinction, could find new life and peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ by the denial of self and through faith in and love toward God. "But God," writes Paul, "who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us [all], even when we were dead through our trespasses, *made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with him*, and made us sit with him in the heavenly



places in Christ Jesus" (*italics added*) (Ephesians 2:4-6). With consummate skill and exquisite choice of words Paul here lifts us up to inspired heights as his own heart overflows at the contemplation of the Cross-Resurrection theme which he presents in all of its glory in his letter to the Ephesians.

Paul sometimes connected the Cross-Resurrection motif with the hope of a future Resurrection of the "body." One of these future-looking treatments is found in the letter to the Philippians: "Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. . . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. . . . But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Philippians 3:8, 10-12, 20, 21). Paul's Cross-Resurrection faith was eschatological as well as existential, as this passage reveals, but we shall not deal with this aspect of his theology in detail at this point. The Resurrection meant for him that in the "end" the Power that raised Jesus from the dead and glorified him would also raise all believers from the dead and give them glorified (spiritual) bodies.

Paul did not teach a radical (Greek) separation of the "soul" from the physical body at death, but rather looked forward to a "body" (person) transformed from the physical to a "glorified" (spiritual) body (person). He used the figure of the seed which has been planted in the ground and which springs into life and grows into a plant. The "dead" seed is transformed into a "living" plant. So it is with the believer in Christ. He will be planted like a seed in death, but he will come forth into life like the plant from the seed sown in the earth. But this is a mystery, says Paul, and God alone knows the *how* of it (compare I Corinthians 15). Incidentally, the passage in Philippians (3:12-16) reveals that Paul's conception of salvation was dynamic and progressive. Paul knew that he had "not arrived" as yet, but he knew also that he was *on the way in Christ*.

Also, incidentally, Paul's many references to baptism *into* and *with*



Christ, and so on, should help us to get a different perspective relative to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Too many Christians still think of these ordinances as representations of the death and Resurrection of Christ, and so they are. But they are much more than this. They are also representations of the Cross and Resurrection Power of God at work within the believer. They are more than mere symbols too, because they picture a dynamic process going on all the time in the person, even though he has been once baptized or repeatedly participates in the Lord's Supper. Christ is truly present with him and in him during these observances. This realization should give many of us a new appreciation for the beauty, meaning, and power of these ordinances. Such an understanding of the vital place and significance these ordinances hold in our Christian experience should also help us to overcome the grossly materialistic and mechanical interpretations we sometimes have placed on them. A dynamic, personal view of salvation will not support these mechanical and materialistic interpretations of the ordinances, for Christ on this view is known to be present in the believer's life and experience, that is, in a living fellowship with him, and not present in the material elements of the ordinances.

### Hope

We have already spoken briefly about the eschatological hope that dwells in the Christian's heart as a result of the Resurrection of Christ. This hope itself is a part of the saving process going on in the believer. Paul avers that we are saved in hope (Romans 8:24). Peter says that by "... [God's] great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a *salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*" (italics added) (I Peter 1:3-5). This is especially significant coming from Peter, because Peter was one who had lost hope during the crucifixion and had even denied his Lord. But now a "living hope" is his because of the Resurrection, and this "living hope" sees by anticipation the salvation which is to be completed in the future.

Again we note that the progressive and incomplete aspect of salvation is asserted, and that hope itself appears as that forward-looking



(eschatological) aspect of faith which is existential or of the moment. Or, to put it another way, hope is that quality or aspect of faith that makes the eschatological future also present in existential faith. Rudolf Bultmann has given us a lucid and compelling treatment of this subject in one of his books: "To be historical means to live from the future. The believer too lives from the future; first because his faith and his freedom can never be possession; as belonging to the eschatological event [Total Event?] they can never become facts of past time but are reality only over and over again as event [Kierkegaard's "repetition"?]; secondly because the believer remains within history. In principle, the future always offers to man [in hope] the gift of freedom; Christian faith is the power to grasp this gift. The freedom of man from himself is always realised in the freedom of historical decisions."<sup>14</sup>

Without the hope of the Resurrection faith of the New Testament the eschatological-existential aspect of man's involvement in time and space and history would be an awful enigma and nightmare. Man would hope but he would not know the meaning of his hope or what he was hoping for. For the man in Christ the future becomes present and the present becomes future in the faith-hope response to the God of Love. "According to the New Testament," writes Bultmann, "*Jesus Christ is the eschatological event*, the action of God by which God has set an end to the old world. In the preaching of the Christian Church the eschatological event will ever again become present and does become present ever and again in faith."<sup>15</sup>

Whatever the nature of the future, the Christian is sure of one thing: that the hope of the future is in Christ, which means that some sort of cosmic redemption must be envisioned, for the Risen Christ surely cannot be finally conquered. There are several passages in the New Testament which deal with this theme, for example, Colossians 1:15-20; Philippians 2:9-11; Ephesians 1:19-23; Romans 8:18-21; Revelation 21; 22, and so on. We shall not deal here with these passages, but only point out that all confidently affirm that a glorious and victorious consummation of the ages will eventually take place under the mighty power of God in the Christ-Spirit working in men's hearts. Wolf sums up this line of thought very clearly: "A description

<sup>14</sup> Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p. 152.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.



of Christ's saving work that stops short of redemption from sinfulness is not one that has understood the whole message of the New Testament. . . . Even the term restoration, while true as far as it goes, fails to catch the fullness of God's act. 'The New Creation,' 'New Birth,' 'New Heavens and a New Earth'—all these phrases and many more point to salvation as a cosmic event and to a creation freed from the ravages of sin."<sup>16</sup>

### Eternal Life

Jesus said to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26). The faith of the Resurrection is a faith for Life. This is the fitting theme with which to close this study of reconciliation and salvation. Reconciliation through the Cross and salvation to Life through the Resurrection is the Christian faith in its essence, whether related to the present (existential) or to the future (eschatological), or to both at the same time, as Jesus did (compare John 5:25-29), and as the New Testament writers sometimes did (compare II Corinthians 4:10-18; Philippians 3:10, 11).

Eternal Life is God's Life *being realized* in the loving believer. It is Eternal because it is of God. It is indestructible because it is God's Life. It is not construed in quantitative terms in the New Testament, but in qualitative terms. It is a quality of Life that grasps the believer as an "ultimate concern" (Paul Tillich) and will not let him go. Men may reject this Life, but at their own peril, for to reject this Life means to cut one's self off from the Source of Life itself. This is disastrous. But the fundamental Cross-Resurrection message of the New Testament is that God comes in Christ offering Eternal Life to all who will receive it.

Harris Franklin Rall provides an excellent statement on the Life which we may use as a summary for this section: "Life is the key word for our understanding of salvation. Just as sin means death, so salvation means life. Christianity is the religion of life. It believes in the living God, not in an inscrutable power, not in a mere cosmic order, whether hard or beneficent, but in a God of purpose and action

<sup>16</sup> Wolf, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

who brings his good will to pass. And life is the word which characterizes rightly the Christian way. It is life that God asks of man, no mere gift on the altar, or ritual of worship, or keeping of rules, but the whole life: thought and deed, deepest faith and highest affection, the whole field of man's desiring and doing. In turn it is life that God gives to man. What he asks, he bestows. This is salvation, God's gift of life: life at its fullest and highest, life of body and spirit, life individual and inner, life in its social aspects, the corporate life of man developing in history, life consummated in another world. Salvation is life."<sup>17</sup>

### The Total Event

The purpose of this endeavor from the beginning has been to show that Christian theologians have all too often engaged in a fragmentation or particularization of the Christian faith on the basis of one or the other of the historical events associated with the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The most prevalent and widespread particularization of the Christian faith has been rooted in the Cross as the central and all-important event constituting the basis of the Christian doctrine of the Atonement.

In an article on the Atonement, in a volume just off the press, a contemporary theologian writes: "The final revelation of God was made at the cross; everything else in the New Testament record is subordinate to this central event."<sup>18</sup> The writer then proceeds to indicate at some length that the essential ground for the Christian doctrine of the Atonement is the death of Jesus. To give weight to his argument he cites Paul who wrote that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:3), but he fails to cite Paul's very next statement which gives equal emphasis to the Resurrection. This has been the habit of theologians innumerable through the centuries down to this very moment, that is, the habit of picking fragments of verses here and there from the New Testament to prove that the Cross, and the Cross alone, constitutes the sole ground of the Atonement. But in my opinion this is an uncritical, an unscientific, and an unbiblical method of exegesis which has

<sup>17</sup> Harris Franklin Rall, *Religion as Salvation* (Nashville, Tenn., Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), p. 92. Used by permission.

<sup>18</sup> W. Boyd Hunt, "Atonement," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists* (Nashville, Tenn., Broadman Press, 1958), I, 92.



resulted in serious distortions of the Christian faith, as I have attempted to show in this study, and has led to a fragmentized and/or compartmentalized conception of God's working in Christ which is unwarranted in the light of the whole New Testament message.

Can we speak seriously of the Cross as being the "central event" and "final revelation of God" at the expense of the Incarnation and the Resurrection? It is clear to me that the New Testament, if it stresses any one of these events as being climactic, affirms that the Resurrection is climactic. This, of course, is not to say that the Resurrection itself is any more important than the Cross or Incarnation. But it is to say, with the New Testament, that the Incarnation and the Cross are incomplete without the Resurrection. In fact, there would have been no New Testament and no Christian Church had it not been for the Resurrection. The Cross would have remained an obscure and meaningless event apart from the Resurrection, of interest only to the historian.

Paul's Resurrection perspective is surely in evidence when he writes: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (*italics added*) (I Corinthians 15:17). In the light of this verse alone, how can we hold that the solitary Cross explains the atoning works of God? The Cross surely has meaning, but only in relation to the Resurrection. This the New Testament in numerous passages makes very clear. What we Christian theologians need to do, it seems to me, is to rise above the purely historical events recorded in the New Testament, as the New Testament itself does, and view the working of God in the Christ-Spirit from the cosmic or universal point of view, as well as see His working from the particular point of view in terms of certain events connected with the life and death of Jesus. That is to say, we must see God's reconciling and saving works in terms of what I choose to call the Total Event. But, we ask, how can we finite creatures view God's working from the cosmic or universal point of view? The answer must lie in the revelation of God Himself to us, that is, in His Speaking (Word) now to us. Only God can enable us to see from His point of view.

The term "Total Event" has been used a number of times in this treatise.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps it should have been defined at the beginning of

<sup>19</sup> If I have borrowed the term "Total Event" from another, I shall be glad to acknowledge it.

the book, but, be that as it may, we now offer a brief definition. By Total Event is meant the Total Working of God in human life and history. The Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection of Christ as historical events are to be bracketed within the Total Event of God's reconciling and saving works. In other words, the historical events connected with Jesus the Christ were only historical manifestations of God's continuous working with and in men from the beginning of human history to the end. The Total Event is past, present, and future at the same time. The Total Event is eschatological-existential history, wherein man, through loving faith in the God-Christ-Spirit, the Trinity, experiences the eternal in time, the future in the present, life in death, hope in anxiety, victory in defeat, for God is above all (Father), in all (Son), and through all (Holy Spirit).

Paul's way of asserting the Total Event is by using three titles in various arrangements, usually in the following order: Lord Jesus Christ. In this threefold title he expressed, I think, what is here meant by the Total Event. The Total Event "begins" in God (Lord) and "ends" in God (Christ), and in between are the historical events of the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection (Jesus). Note that Paul usually bracketed "Jesus" between "Lord" and "Christ." This arrangement was no accident on Paul's part, I am sure. This is the way he chose to show that the reconciliation and salvation of men and of all things begin and end in the eternal purposes and workings of God Himself, as He works in the Christ-Word-Spirit, and as He continues to work in a lesser and more limited way through the Church, Scriptures, and believers themselves.



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